

EDUCATION IN EARLY ISLAMIC PERIOD

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Ph.D. (Education)

IN THE MEMORY OF MY MOTHER

Saleha Begum Sahiba

*Who did not live to see this work though; and
whom I could not serve consistently while she
was on her way to her heavenly abode as I was
busy with completing this work.*

CONTENTS

Acknowledgement	7
Author's note on Second Edition	8
Introduction	9
Significance of the Problem	10
Title and Statement of the Problem	11
Method and Limitations of the Study	12
Scope for further study	12

CHAPTER—I

Education in the Pre-Islamic Arabia	13
--	----

CHAPTER—II

Islam and its Approach to Education	25
--	----

CHAPTER—III

Education Under the Prophet	33
The Prophet as a Teacher	33
His method of Teaching	36
Scribes, Qurra and Huffaz	37
Darul Arqam	39
Kuttab, Mosques	40
Suffah	42
Dar Al-Qurra	43
Female Education	43
Curriculum	45
Specialization and Diversification of Courses	46
Organization and Supervisions	47

CHAPTER—IV

Education Under the Pious Caliphate	53
Abdullah B. Abbas	68
Abdullah B. Al-A's	69
Abdullah B. Masu'd	69
Abdullah B. Umar B. Al-Khattab	70
Amr B. Hazam	71
Anas B. Malik	71
Abu Hurairah	71
Muawiyah B. Abu Sufyan	72

CHAPTER—V

Conclusions	79
Bibliography	83

Acknowledgment

To present this study in such form as it is, was truly impossible for me. This is, undoubtedly, the outcome of the inspiring guidance and constant supervision of my two learned teachers, Mr. Ali Akhter Khan, Reader, Department of Education and Dr. Ishtiaque Ahmad Zilli, Reader, Department of History, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. Their valuable suggestions and thoughtful comments which I got in the course of this study are not confined to it only but have certainly paved the way for me to make deeper study in the field concerned. I must not forget their benevolence which they have shown to me in very difficult and adverse moments in order to keep my academic interest safe and secure. I do not find adequate words to thank them for their favour which I hardly deserve.

It is with great appreciation that I acknowledge the endowment of the respectable Chairman Idara-e-Ishaat-e-Islam Trust, Delhi on whose recommendation I was awarded Maulana Mawdudi Memorial Scholarship launched by World Assembly of Muslim Youth, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, to make research on some of the aspects of Islamic system of Education of which the present study is only a part.

I am also indebted to Mr. Arshad Ajmal who during his fellowship in Idara-e-Tahqeeque-o-Tasneef-i-Islami (Islamic Research Centre), Aligarh, took pains to provide me relevant information on the topic concerned. I am greatly thankful to my venerable teacher Maulana Mohammad Irtezauddin Saheb who first of all inspired me to undertake this work. And lastly, it was my father Janab Mohammed Qaseemuddin Khan Saheb who shared my liabilities and once again allowed me to study at Aligarh.

May Allah give the best recompense to all of them.

June 22, 1987

ZAFAR ALAM

Mohalla: CHOWKHANDI,
SASARAM (Bihar)

Author's Note on Second Edition

In this new edition of the book improvement has been brought about in the light of the comments and suggestions made by the scholars inside and outside the country. The references used in this book have again been verified. Nonetheless lapses are not ruled out.

October 15, 1993

ZAFAR ALAM

Introduction

Islam to the believer is the most comprehensive philosophy and way of life for mankind. Though in the ultimate analysis concerned with, and assuring blissful solace in the life hereafter, it nevertheless touches this worldly life in all its aspects and provides guidance to those who seek it. Its holy scripture, Quran, is claimed to contain the final edition of instructions and guidelines revealed by God for the eternal benefit of mankind. Whatever be its faith and dogma, the fact, however is that the last fourteen hundred years of world history have seen this religion as a vibrating force moral as well as political.

Having remained comparatively dormant during the last few centuries, Islam is once again on the ascendance. Freedom of the predominantly Muslim countries of West Asia and Africa from their colonial rulers, discovery and use by them of the powerful weapon of oil has once again brought Islam in focus.

Organised efforts are being made in Muslim as well as non-Muslim countries to present Islam as a system of life applicable to the modern age. Islamic movements of various hue and colours have been launched in most of the Asia, Africa and European countries with the explicit and declared objective of reconstructing the human society in all its aspects—political, social, economic, educational, and founding it on the tenets of Islam. Islam is already the law of the land in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Iran and Pakistan have also declared themselves as Islamic republics. There seems to be a global resurgence sweeping through Afghanistan, Philippine and a host of other countries and regions. Once again the spotlight is on Islam and its various institutions.

The world is reacting to this new awakening and resurgence of Islam in diverse ways, ranging from open and outright hostility

to fraternal understanding and accommodation. The healthiest and the soundest is, undoubtedly, the academic response and attitude towards it.

For a proper understanding of the phenomenal rise of Islam and the eternal inspiration it provides, it has come to be considered essential to subject its various systems and institutions to the severest possible scientific inquiry and investigation. For this purpose universities, institutes and departments of Islamic studies have come to be established in various parts of the world. Our own Aligarh Muslims University is presently running two separate departments of Islamic Studies and West Asian Studies. Besides the formal governmental academic agencies, different voluntary social organisations too, in different parts of the world, are encouraging and promoting research studies on various aspects of Islam. As a result, a good number of scientifically conducted research studies on various aspects of Islam are now available to help draw inferences and conclusions about Islam.

It is generally felt that while other aspects of Islam have received comparatively greater attention on the part of researchers, its educational aspect has remained largely neglected. This is why Robert Gulick laments the general tendency on the part of scholars to ignore the educational aspect of Islam, and also points out the glaring fact that no article on Islam or on the Prophet of Islam is found in Monroe's Cyclopedia of Education. This Cyclopedia while giving some information about Arabic education but totally ignoring Islamic education, justifies Gulick's lamentation that, "a tree is recognised but a forest is over-looked".¹

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROBLEM

Apart from this attitude of neglect, whenever present day scholars feel the need to write on Islamic System of Education, they focus their all attention only on Madrasa System of Education. They take for study only *Maktab* and *Kuttab* as the primary institution of education and *Halqa*, as the higher institution of education. No one can deny the place and importance which the Madrasa has had in the Muslim educational system. It needs, however, to be kept in mind that this system of education was founded in the fifth century after Hijra. The system of education,

1. *Muhammad the Educator*, Institute of Islamic Culture, Lahore, 1961, p. 4.

which existed prior to the Madrasa system has not been taken due cognizance of. The information available on certain period and aspects of the Islamic education is too fragmentary to allow any systematic study and evaluation. Consequently, anyone trying to sketch out the system of Islamic education comes to face difficulties of diverse nature.

However, in view of its great importance the system of Islamic education needs intensive and extensive study, particularly of its phase relating to the Golden Age of Islam ranging from the time of the Prophet to the days of the pious Caliphate. In this connection even the minutest information which may cursorily appear insignificant and negligible is to be taken into consideration as something very significant in order to structure bit by bit the system of Islamic education. Every complex system develops from its simple form and if the simple form is ignored, the complex system itself cannot be correctly comprehended. The study of the Islamic system of education is, therefore, to be made from its roots upwards. This brief study, therefore, attempts to start with the early traditions of Islamic learning and then to gradually work out the system of Islamic education in as systematic and scientific a manner as possible as it was prevalent in the early Islamic period. In fact, the spread of literacy and education among the Muslims took place through the medium of religion—through their ever-increasing desire to know more and more about Islam and its application in the individual and social life.

TITLE AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The present study is precisely “A Study on Education in Early Islamic Period.” That is, the Education in Early Islamic Period (ranging from the time of the Prophet to the days of pious Caliphate) is attempted to be studied in the background of the educational climate which existed in the pre-Islamic period, that is just before the emergence of Islam at Makka and Madina. As educational institutions are generally founded on and reflect a certain philosophy or life approach of their own, their proper study can be made only with reference to that philosophy or life approach. This study, therefore, includes, in addition to the three chapters of a historical nature, a theoretical chapter on “The Islamic Approach to Education”.

METHOD AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Since the subject of the study is mainly of a historical and theoretical nature, the historico-philosophical method of study as the most suitable method has been used. It is mainly a library based study. In view of the investigator's lack of the knowledge of Arabic language, only the authentic sources of information available in English and Urdu have been depended upon. Wherever needed and possible Arabic Texts have been consulted with the help of dictionaries. The Researcher has tried to consult relevant material available in journals, magazines, encyclopedias and other types of documents. For the theoretical portion, he has mainly relied on the primary sources of Islam, that is Quran and Hadith.

Apart from the Researcher's lack of command over the Arabic language, the other limitation which made him somewhat handicapped was the paucity of time and funds. This study, therefore, suffers from limitations more than one. In more favourable circumstances, perhaps, this study would have been much better than what it is.

SCOPE FOR FURTHER STUDY

The present study, obviously, is neither exhaustive nor very intensive on its subject. The Islamic System of Education in its golden age can certainly not be exhausted or even properly explored by one or two studies. Hence the Researcher further proposes to present a comprehensive study on "The Islamic Concept of Education" in his Ph.D. thesis. The Islamic system of education offers a very wide scope of further studies. Some of its aspects, which the scholars interested in this particular field may profitably take up for studies are briefly mentioned below for their consideration.

- (a) Aims and objectives of Islamic Education in Comparison to those of secular education.
- (b) Islamic Principles of Curriculum Construction.
- (c) Islamic Methodology of Education.
- (d) Role of the Teacher and the nature of the learner in Islamic System of Education.

Education in the Pre-Islamic Arabia

Living conditions and the level of cultural attainments of the people inhabiting a particular area are to a large extent determined and governed by the environmental and geographical conditions of that region. Climate, for example, determines the nature of food, dress and such other needs; and physical and geographical conditions determine the occupation and mode of earning the livelihood. Some areas are fertile and suitable for agriculture occupations others are arid and barren, forcing their inhabitants to lead an unsettled nomadic life of hardship. Lands and regions fertile and rich in natural resources allow their inhabitants enough time to pursue cultural pursuits and as a result cultures develop and civilizations prosper rapidly. On the other hand, people of arid and barren regions who are made to toil hard for living are left with no or not much time to devote to cultural pursuits and refinement. Their culture and civilizations therefore suffer and lag behind those of others.

The ancient Arabs who inhabited the vast desert of Arabia belonged to this category of people.¹ The climatic conditions were so harsh and the problem of eking out their livelihood from that inhospitable land was so difficult that it kept them engaged and occupied all the time. They had neither the time nor the means to attain any recognizable level of cultural refinement or to establish any fruitful relationship with the neighbouring Roman and Persian empires which had a very high level of civilization. As a result of this peculiar geographical condition the Arabs were living almost in complete isolation of the rest of the world, unaffected by the cultural influences of the vastly advanced neighbouring countries. Arab civilizations of that time was based primarily on the simple crafts related to the needs of daily life, like carpentry, smithy,

tailoring, weaving, etc. Even in these simple crafts the skill of the craftsmen was not of such a high standard as was found in the neighbouring areas of those days. The craftsmen could barely satisfy the needs and demands of the very simple and austere life the pagan Arabs were living those days.² However the conditions in Yemen and to some extent in Makka were different where sedentary life existed. Yemen was a fertile and agricultural zone where artificial irrigation had been in practice earlier. The magnificent ruins of the pre-Islamic architecture in Yemen also speak of the high level of cultural development that had taken place there in those days. Yemen's civic life and standards were definitely of a much higher order than what was found in other parts of Arabia. Thus it would not be correct to say that Arabia of that period was completely devoid of culture and civilizations. There were definitely green patches of culture on the brown sand of the Arabian desert. The oasis was unmistakably there, though overwhelmed by vast desert surroundings. Moreover, the evolution of Arabic language and the poetic accomplishments of the pre-Islamic Arabs also bear testimony to the fact that a certain level of cultural refinement had already been achieved.³

It is not proposed here to enter into a discussion on the evolution of the Arabic language, but a brief introduction would not be out of place as Arabic language and the poetic compositions of the Arabs represented the highest water mark of their intellectual attainment.

The present Arabic language developed out of its two distinctive forms—the South Arabic and the North Arabic. Differences in grammar, vocabulary and script are found in those two forms. South Arabic is today known only through inscriptions and North Arabic is known simply as Arabic language.⁴ About 4000 inscriptions related to South Arabic language are found today. Carsten Niebuhr was the first to discover the existence of South Arabic inscriptions and after him many scholars discovered and published their readings. Through these inscriptions it was revealed that South Arabic had twenty-nine letters of alphabet. This shows the richness and the level of development of the language in its early stage. But with the decay of Yemanite culture, South Arabic disappeared and North Arabic took its place.⁵

Several states existed in Northern Arabia. Among these, one was Nabataean kingdom, which, for sometimes extended north to Damascus. The ruins of Petra, the Nabataean capital city, is a proof of the magnificent culture of that time.⁶ Nabataeans used Arabic as an every-day-language and their cursive script developed in the third century of our era and proved to be the precursor of the script of North Arabic tongue, the Arabic of the Quran and that of the present day.⁷ The oldest Arabic inscription discovered so far is that of al-Namarah, which goes back to A.D. 328 and was set up as an epitaph on the tomb of Imraul Qays, a king of Hira. This evidence gives some idea about the background of the evolution of the classical Arabic, the language which later on became the vehicle of magnificent literary activities.⁸ This view is also supported by K.H. Semaan who feels that it were Nabataean Arabs who initiated their kinsmen to the path of education and culture. The ruins, relics and inscriptions uncovered in the Arabian peninsula testify that in pre-Islamic Arabia culture and cultural attainments were not totally lacking.⁹ Though Nabataeans were cultured yet it is also a fact that neither they nor any other people in North Arabia succeeded in developing a complete system of writing and continued to express themselves through the medium of cursive writing. Only three pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions have thus far been found. These are of Zabad south-east Aleppo (512), of Harran in al-Laja (568) and Umm-al-Jimal (same century). These three inscriptions are other than the most primitive Arabic inscriptions of Imraul Qays in al-Namara, (328).¹⁰ Thus in the light of available evidence it is clear that though writing was not unknown to the Arabs its system was not fully developed and its use was very rare. It would, however, appear that the process of the perfection of the system of writing has continued from the time of the Nabataeans onward.

It was the field of poetic expression in which the pre-Islamic Arabs developed themselves most. Probably all the pre-Islamic poems which have come down to us belong to the century immediately preceding Islam. But their elaborate form and technical perfection would suggest that it was not a sudden development. It must have taken them a long time to achieve this perfection and maturity. Actually these poems were preserved through hundreds of years by oral traditions.¹¹ It was through the medium of poetry that pre-Islamic annals (*Ayyam ul Arab* accounts) were preserved

and the genealogies and famous actions were handed down to the posterity.¹² These poems represent not only a very high degree of beauty of expression but also the essence of Arab wisdom and intellect. They formed the repositories of Arab intellectual heritage and were treasured as such.

Popular fairs and congregations were the regular feature of the pre-Islamic Arabian society. In the highly fragmented tribal society inter-tribal conflicts, feuds, revenge and vendetta were the order of the day. Under such a situation these fairs and congregations helped a great deal in relieving the social tensions through encouraging social intercourse. They were the focal points of intellectual, social, political and literary life of the old Arabian society. They provided an opportunity to the members of the various tribes to get together in a free atmosphere and exchange ideas. This was possible because of the fact that they were held in the months of truce which were scrupulously observed by all Arabs. Among these fairs *Ukaz*, *Mijannah* and *Dhi al-Majaz* were more important. These fairs served not only as commercial centres but also as venues for various kinds of games and sports, races, archery, swordsmanship, wrestling etc. Literary competitions were also held along with the competitions in games and sports. Recitation of poems, making of speeches and participation in debates used to be the main attractions of these fairs.¹³ The most famous fair was that of *Ukaz* which was held at 'Ukaz/ near Taif in present day Saudi Arabia. This fair lasted for twenty days and was like a literary congress. Poets of various tribes gathered there and used to present their odes. These odes are still honoured throughout the Arabic-speaking world as master-pieces of poetical compositions. The poetic composition which was adjudged to be the best of the year used to be inscribed in golden letters and displayed on the walls of the holy *Kabah* in Makkah.¹⁴ These poems are called *Mu'allaqat*. *Mu'allaqat* are long poems and generally they are believed to be seven in number, therefore sometimes they are called "The Seven Long Poems (*al-Sab al Tiwal*).¹⁵ It is, therefore, said that all the poetical compositions of pre-Islamic period have come down through oral traditions with the exception of the *Mu'allaqat*.

Excepting the inscriptions already mentioned, no specimen of writing, especially of prose-writing, appears to have survived from the pre-Islamic period. This would suggest that though written

documents were used for commercial and diplomatic purposes, at least by Makkans, their use was very rare. The way Makkan envoy Suhail b. Amr at Hudaibia objected to the form of the treaty is a clear evidence that not only written documents were used by the Makkans but as a result of its use a set form and phraseology had been evolved.¹⁶ As far as prose-literature is concerned, there is no evidence to suggest its existence in written form. What we have today in the shape of pre-Islamic prose-literature, was actually composed in Islamic period. The prose-literature of the pre-Islamic period was based on genealogies and intertribal combats. Ibn Durayd's *Kitab al-Ishtiqaq* and Abu al-Farj al-Isfahani's *Kitab al-Aghani* (the book of songs) provide a good deal of information on the subject of genealogies (*Ansab*).¹⁷ Nicholson observes that on the basis of these later-composed works one can find the trace of proverbs (*Mithal*), oration (*Khutba*), history and romance in the pre-Islamic Arabic prose literature.¹⁸ Actually the pre-Islamic Arabic literature, though unwritten was very rich in these aspects and it is evident from the traditions preserve in these as well as other books.

Thus it is evident from the foregoing that the masterpieces of the pre-Islamic literature were preserved and handed down through oral tradition and for this purpose there was an institution resembling that of Rhapsodists in Greece. Every reputed poet had his *Rawi* (reciter) who accompanied him every where, committed his poems to-memory and handed them down to others. The relation between the poet and his *Rawi* was very close. Sometimes a poet had a *Rawi* and the *Rawi* as a poet himself had a *Rawi*. For example, Zuhayr was the *Rawi* of his step father, Aws b. Hajar while his own *Rawi* was al-Hutay'a.¹⁹

Apart from above mentioned literary activities there are some other aspects of the *Jahiliyyah* period (period of ignorance) which are important from the point of view of culture and the spread of the rudiments of education among the Arabs. No doubt, in the *Jahiliyyah* period there was culture but it was culture of a different kind. The outstanding characteristics of this culture were the innumerable barbarous practices, the savage temper, the tribal pride and the endless tribal war. It is because of these characteristics of the then prevalent culture that the period had come to be known as *Aiyyami-Jahiliyyah* (Period of Ignorance). Along with these negative

aspects, there were also specimens of magnificent Arabic Poetry, proverbs and orations which formed the positive aspects of pre-Islamic Arabic culture. However, on the whole the pre-Islamic Arab culture was still far behind the culture of contemporary Persia and Egypt.²⁰

After a detailed discussion on the characteristics of Beduin life and the conditions obtaining in the desert, Ahmad Amin comes to the conclusion that the intellectual life of the Arab was confined to language, poetry, proverbs stories and anecdotes, etc. They had no idea of philosophy and science; it was just not possible in these conditions. No doubt, they knew quite something about medicine and stars but it would be wrong to call it science as Alusi has wrongly done. It did not amount to anything more than the rudimentary knowledge and accumulated experience that had been transmitted from generation to generation. They had no ideas of the fundamentals of science and philosophy, though traces of some philosophical ideas may be found in their poetry and proverbs. Whatever little scientific knowledge they had was based on casual observation and experiences and not on organised thinking and reasoning which is the hallmark of science.²¹

While discussing at length the nature of *Jahiliyyah*, Goldziher points out that the characteristics of *Jahiliyyah* were barbaric customs and the wild mentality. He declares that the reformatory steps taken by the Prophet of Islam were based on *hilm*. He points out that language-wise knowledge or *hilm* presents a better contrast to *Jahl*.²² But *Hilm* is preferred, for it conveys the sense better. *Hilm* stands for a quality of mind and character which includes unemotional approach, claim deliberation and mildness of manner. *Halim* is a person who is civilized, while *Jahil* is one who is wild, violent, and cruel.²³

Nicholson demarcates the period of *Jahiliyyah* as ranging from 500 A.D. to 622 A.D.²⁴ K.H. Semaan claims that the *Jahiliyyah* period had an educational system but he has not been able to produce any evidence in support of his view. He argues that the available *Jahiliyyah* records consisting of genealogies, legend, folklores, rhetorical prose and poetry must have been passed on from one generation to another through a definite system of education prevailing in those days.²⁵ He opines that without some kind of a system of education there being of vast records of the

Jahiliyyah period should not have been made possible. However, the fact that these academic and literary works were preserved through oral traditions and that these were edited and compiled in the later Islamic periods, particularly in the Abbaside period, does not clearly prove the existence of a sound system of education. On the basis of such a large number of literary and academic works having been preserved and transmitted from the *Jahiliyyah* period to the Islamic period, it can only be surmised that some kind of a system of education, perhaps, did exist in those days to make all this possible. And even if it did exist its nature must have been quite different from the one which came to be developed in the Islamic period. In view of the conditions prevailing in those days it must have been primarily an oral education, simple and rudimentary in its contents. Nevertheless it did fulfil its basic function of the preservation and transmission of the cultural and literary heritage of that period. In this sense, it may be justifiable to call it an education system. Of course, Bedouinism with its traditional instability, constant wandering, very hard life conditions and other such factors made it practically impossible to obtain any formal education.²⁶ No scientific literature existed except a few magical, meteorological and medicinal formulae transmitted orally. However they were not completely untouched by the educational zeal of their neighbours. The influence of Jewish and Christian teachers and of foreign culture such as of Hira and Ghassan made bedouins to some extent skillful.²⁷ The presence of a large number of utensils of writing in pre-Islamic Arabia is also a proof of it. No doubt the number of the literate people was very small but the very fact that even a few people were literate indicates some degree of education and learning. Though Makka the largest city and centre of trade and culture was not an abode of literature and learning but still it could boast of a number of people who were conversant with writing.²⁸ It is, therefore, on the basis of historical evidence that Zewmer had rejected the thesis that writing was not known to the Makkans before A.D. 560 and that it was Harb b. Umayyah, father of Abu Sufyan, who introduced writing at Makka. Very old trade relations of Makkans with the Yemenites, to whom the art of writing was well-known, might have been one of the factors contributing to the introduction of writing among the Arabs.²⁹ Baladuri reports that Zuhra bin Kilab the Prophet's great great grandfather knew to write

the alphabets and used to teach it to others. He further asserts that the Arab merchants taught writing (*al Khatt*) to each other in that period which was devoid of learning.³⁰

It is stated that Sufyan b. Umayyah and Abu Qais b. 'Abd Manaf were the persons who first learned the art of reading and writing in Makka. They learnt it from a Christian named ibn Abd al-Malik who had learnt this art in Hira.³¹ An old parchment in the library of al-Mamun was supposed to be the oldest written document of Makka. It was an acknowledgment of having received a debt of one thousand dirhams. Its penmanship was like that of a woman but it was supposed to have been the handwriting of Abd-al-Muttalib Ibn Hashim. This relic was the only example of a written document having survived from the *Jahiliyyah*.³² Abdul Muttalib (the grand father of the Prophet) is also credited to have written some thing in his younger days i.e., about A.D. 520, though it did not survive. From two hundred years before Hijrah, Jews and Christians were living in the neighbourhood of Makkah and were using some type of writing, but Makka was far advanced of Madina in the art of writing. It was normal custom for poets and traders to write on parchments. Abbas, the Prophet's uncle and Ali, the fourth Caliph were among the literate persons of the *Jahiliyyah* period. Jaber and Yaser, the two sword-makers, used to read the *Taurat* and the *Injil*. Warqa ibn Naufil also read the Gospel and copied it in the Hebrew.³³

The first man who adopted teaching of reading and writing as a profession was a native of Wadi-al-Qura.³⁴ He began to teach some of his fellow citizens. But due to peculiar conditions of Arabia the spread of learning was very slow so much so that at the time of the rise of Islam there were only 17 persons in Quraish who were able to read and write. Al-Baladuri had given their names in his *Futuh al-Baldan*. They were Umar b. Khattab, Ali b. Abi Talib, Usman b. Affan, Abu Ubaida b. Jarrah, Talha, Yazid b. Abi Sufyan, Abu Huzaifah b. Utba b. Rabia, Hatib b. Amr, Abu Salman b. Abdul Asad al-Mukhzumi, Aban b. Sayeed b. al-A's b. Umayyah, Khalid b. Sayeed and his brother, Abdullah b. S'ab b., Abi Sarah al-'Amiri, Huwaitib Ibn Abdul Uzza al-Amiri, Abu Sufyan b. Harb, Muawiyah b. Abi Sufyan, Juhaime b. Sallat. Besides, among the allies of Quraish al-'Ala b. Hazrami also knew the art and skill of reading and writing.³⁵

Regarding the development of education in Makkah and Madina, Tashkoprizada gives an interesting information in *Miftah as - Sa'ada* about the introduction of writing in Makkah and Madina. According to him the person mainly responsible for the introduction of the art of writing among the Makkan was Abu-Sufyan ibn Umayyah, uncle of Abu Sufyan ibn Harb, who studied Arabic writing in Yemen. Abu Sufyan, and his son, Muawiyah were among those who learned the art and, Umar, the second Caliph, learned it from Abu-Sufyan. The people of Madina learned the art of reading and writing from Jews and at the time of the migration of the Prophet, there were about a dozen people who could read and write.³⁶ Undoubtedly the knowledge of writing was more common among the Makkans than among the people of Madina. This is evident from the fact that those prisoners of Badr who knew the art of writing were asked to teach a certain number of people and earn their release.³⁷ Now clearly these people were the products of *Jahiliyyah* period.

It would appear from the sources that learning was not totally unknown to the women in pre-Islamic Arabia. We come across several names of poetesses in pre-Islamic Arabic literature such as Lyla and Khansa, who were well known poetesses of their times.³⁸ According to a Hadith cited by Abu-Dawud, Hafsah, the wife of the Prophet learned the art of writing with Prophet's permission from a lady named Shifa, daughter of Abdullah. This lady teacher had learnt this art in the *Jahiliyyah* period.³⁹

Besides, there is evidence to suggest that at least in some regions and some tribes some sort of educational system was in operation. This, obviously, might not have been a well-organized system but still the very existence of such institutions in pre-Islamic Arabia is significant. According to the sources, the Jews of Madina had established *Baitul Midras* (Home of Learning) which served down to the Islamic times and was a centre of literary and religionistic activities.⁴⁰ Banu Hudhail, the allies and kinsmen of Quraish, who lived near Makka had arranged for the schooling of their children. It is interesting to note that this school of Hudhail was attended not only by boys but also by girls.⁴¹ Moreover there are reports suggesting the existence of schools in Makka, Taif, Anbar, Hirah and Daumatul Jandal.⁴² These schools might have been very primitive but nevertheless they must have played some role in

educating the people of the respective regions. Moreover the presence of these schools reflects the consciousness of the need and importance of education among those communities, and, herein lies their real-significance.

Besides these educational and semi-educational institutions, the Arabic language of that time is also a proof of educational consciousness of pre-Islamic Arabs. In pre-Islamic Arabic we find a large vocabulary pertaining to reading and writing. Some of them are as follows :

qalam (pen); *nun* (inkpot); *raqq and qirtas* (parchment and paper); *marqum, mastur, mustatar, maktub, khat* (to write); *imla* (to dictate); *Kutub and Suhuf* (books).⁴³

Summing up the discussion, it may be said that in spite of the very harsh, inhospitable and uncongenial life-conditions prevailing in the pre-Islamic Arabia, which were extremely unfavourable to the growth of learning and education, there is evidence to suggest that reading and writing was not entirely unknown in that period, written documents were in use through this practice was not very common, and in certain regions even a rudimentary educational system was in operation. In this connection mention may be made of Makka, Daumatul Jandal and Anbar where some sort of educational institutions were available. Jewish community of Madina, which had a tradition of learning, is credited to have established a sort of literary and religionistic institution known as *Baitul Midras*. Moreover, Banu Hudhail are said to have a school which was attended both by boys and girls of the tribe. Obviously, these institutions must have been of a very primitive nature. But the existence of such institutions is in itself very significant, for it is indicative of the consciousness among the pre-Islamic Arabs of the need and importance of learning and education. Thus, the period of *Jahiliyyah* was not only not completely devoid of knowledge but actually had in it some seeds of learning which germinated and developed when the right soil and sun-shine were provided by Islam later.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Cf. Ibn Khuldun: *Muqaddimah*, translated by Franz Rosenthal, London, 1958 Vol. 1, p. 177.
2. Cf. Ibn Khuldun: *Muqaddimah*, Vol. II, p. 348.

3. Montgomery Watt: *Muhammad at Mecca*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1953, p. 2 also see *Encyclopaedia Britannica* Vol. 1, p. 1043.
4. Funks and Wagnalls, *New Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 2; New York, p. 188.
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Islam and its Approach to Education

“Read: In the name of thy Lord who Created man from a clot, Read and thy Lord is the most Bounteous, Who taught by the pen, Taught man that which he knew not”.¹

These are the first verses revealed to the Prophet. Some scholars are of the opinion that these must have been revealed in written form because when the angel commanded the Prophet “Read” he protested that he did not know how to read. It is argued that the Prophet would not have protested if the angel had only wanted him to repeat the words uttered by him.² Apparently this opinion is not without force and seems to be quite convincing and also shared by some of the earlier exegetists. Now the fact that the very first Quranic revelation is such a forceful exhortation for the acquisition of knowledge and that knowledge is regarded as one of the great bounties of God on human race, is very significant and shows how closely Islam and knowledge identify each other. It is indicative of the extreme importance that the new religion was going to attach to learning and knowledge. At the very outset it pronounces in the most unambiguous and unequivocal terms its attitude towards knowledge and its dissemination which the new community was to take up as a sacred duty. It was going to prove a turning point in the intellectual history of mankind.

When the Prophet migrated to Madina and addressed himself to the task of organizing the new community in accordance with the teachings of the new religion this aspect was not ignored. It was not a mere chance that at a very early stage at Madina Quran commanded the believers to commit to writing every transaction concerning credit:

“O ye who believe! when ye contract a debt for fixed term,. record it in writing...

... and call to witness ... and not be averse to writing down this (contract) whether it be small or great, with (record of) the term thereof; this is more equitable in the sight of God and more sure for testimony, and the best way of avoiding doubt between you..."³

Understandably such revelations were instrumental in creating the necessary conditions for the growth of mass-literacy among the Muslims.⁴ Besides these open exhortations for the acquisition of knowledge and use of written documents in day to day transactions, there are great many verses in the Qurān⁵ which invite human beings to use their senses and exercise their reasoning faculties and thereby reach the ultimate truth. Moreover, Quran constantly encourages observation of the natural phenomena; at various places it stresses the necessity of the study of nature,⁶ the moon,⁷ the tide,⁸ the night,⁹ the star¹⁰, the day,¹¹ plants¹² and animals¹³ — all these have been presented in testimony of the law of nature and the power of the Creator. This is calculated to create a balanced and logical attitude which is so essential for the healthy growth of intellectual activity.

Quran says that there is no limit to knowledge, that the whole universe is made for and is subservient to man and that it is through acquisition of knowledge and use of reason that it can be conquered and made to serve the interest of mankind. The attitude of Quran to knowledge and its acquisition is very positive and emphatic. Time and again it declares that acquisition of knowledge from any source and at any cost is the ordained duty of the believer. Here are some of the verses on the subject, selected as instances, out of great many scattered throughout the Quran:-

- (1) "Allah will exalt those who believe among you, and those who have knowledge, to high ranks" ¹⁴
- (2) "Are those who know equal with those who know not? But only men of understanding will pay heed". ¹⁵
- (3) "Ask the followers of the Remembrance if ye knew not". ¹⁶
- (4) "And the believers should not all go out to fight. Of every troop of them, a party only should go forth; that they (who are left behind) may gain sound knowledge in religion, and that, they

may warn their folk when they return to them, so that they may beware".¹⁷

(5) "My God; increase me in knowledge".¹⁸

Quran assigns third place—only next to God and His angels—to those who possess knowledge, and rightly so. For, unless one has a sound knowledge he cannot understand and appreciate the wisdom (*Hikmah*) of Quran, nor he can be able to follow the tenets of the religion in its true spirit and without knowledge one can neither know the commands of God nor be able to call others to the Eternal Trust. It is because of this paramount importance of knowledge in Islam that acquisition of knowledge and its dissemination has been made a sacred duty of the Muslim community.

Hadith literature also confirms the same attitude towards knowledge.¹⁹ As in *Quran*, learning has been praised lavishly in *Hadith* also. Learned people are declared and hailed as the best in the human lot and are designated as the successors and inheritors of the Prophets.²⁰ After quoting a number of *Ahadith* related to education, Gulick, in his study of the education system of the Prophet's times, makes the following observation;

"Of great importance was this injunction of Muhammad: Let the poor and rich be equal before you in the acquisition of knowledge—It was this statement that led to the establishment of many scholarships at Cairo, Damascus and elsewhere".²¹

In a study of the history of Muslim education in later times Shalaby has also referred to the above-mentioned *Hadith* and comes to the conclusion that in the field of education egalitarianism was fully recognised by the Muslims and poverty was never a hindrance in the way of acquisition of knowledge. He further asserts that before the establishment of schools, every Muslim had free admission to the lectures in the mosques, the centres of education in those days.²² Leon presents a very comprehensive collection of *Hadith* in his article and evaluates the Prophet's contributions to knowledge in various fields. He acknowledges the Prophet as the very distinguished 'world-teacher of the modern thought'.²³ Waheed feels that it was this approach of the Prophet towards education that inspired the Muslim scholars to conduct extremely valuable researches in various departments of science and enrich the human civilization with their intellectual achievements. At a time when novelty in thought was discouraged and

frowned upon in the Christian world, Muslim scholars were engaging in most daring speculations and breaking fresh grounds in philosophical thoughts.²⁴

Islam presented a system of life built around a body of beliefs and a well-defined approach to Man and Society. The Islamic social order, built as it was on certain sound principles and practices unknown earlier to mankind, stood as a unique innovation and experiment in human history.

For proper running of the system, it was necessary that different components of the society were fully aware of their duties and obligations. The onerous responsibility of making the Muslims aware of their duties and educating them about their obligations was shouldered by the Prophet himself. At the same time it was also the joined duty of every member of the community to teach the fellow Muslims anything that he happened to learn from the Prophet or from any other Muslim. In this way knowledge was arranged to percolate down. *Hadith* literature is full of such exhortations where Prophet has made it a bounden duty of the Muslims to teach their fellow brothers²⁵ whatever they came to learn from him in the form of revealed verses and codes of good conduct.²⁶ Thus verse after verse they learnt by heart and preserved for posterity. This was how the *Sunnah* was preserved and transmitted to the succeeding generations in pure form and minutes details. Thus every individual member of the Islamic society was an active participant in the process of expansion of knowledge either as a teacher or a student.

Quest for knowledge has always been an ideal in the history of Islam. Muslims of early Islamic period undertook long and arduous journeys in search of knowledge. The Prophet is reported to have said that those travelling in search of knowledge are in the path of God till they return to their place.²⁷ But this knowledge is not acquired through mysterious means. To acquire this knowledge, the student has to go through the process of comprehension, retention and remembrance of the facts; there is no other way to get hold of it.

The high rank which Islam accords to the learned is evident from a *hadith* which is to the effect that God is most generous; it is His generosity that we get real knowledge from the Prophet who is most generous after Him because he transmits the entire divine

teachings revealed to him, and after the Prophet that man is most generous who acquires knowledge and spreads it.²⁸ Every sincere effort for acquisition of knowledge is, therefore, highly appreciated in Islam. A man who seeks knowledge is sure to be rewarded whether or not he succeeds in his efforts; of course, in the event of success, the reward shall be greater.²⁹

This approach towards knowledge encouraged members of the Islamic community to acquire and cultivate knowledge. Search after true knowledge thus became a noble goal of life, a perennial source of unlimited bliss to the believers in Islam.³⁰ The Prophet is reported to have observed that a believer would never be satisfied with good teachings till he reaches the Paradise.³¹ In Islam thus knowledge is not regarded as an end in itself but rather as means for something higher and more sublime. At another place the Prophet declares that the learned man is also greedy like a worldly man, only their greeds are of two different types—differing vastly in orientations and results.³² The learned man is greedy of knowledge while the worldly man is greedy of wealth; these two are also not alike in their behaviour, the learned man calls others to follow right guidance whereas the worldly man summons the people to follow error.³³ For a person given to pursuit of knowledge for eternal solace and bliss, the Prophet has the highest praise. For, when the people need him he benefits them and when they ignore him, he enriches himself.³⁴

Through the foregoing the Islamic approach to learning and learned becomes crystal clear. How much more value the Prophet attached to learning than to worshipping becomes evident from the fact that he ranked the learned much higher than the devout. It is reported that once the Prophet entered his mosque and found there two groups of Muslims, one engaged in praying and the other busy with acquiring knowledge. He declared that the latter group was superior to the former one. Not only this, he even joined the group of the learned saying that "I was sent only as a teacher."³⁵ On another occasion he is reported to have observe: "The superiority of the learned man over the devout man is like mine over the most contemptible among you. God, his angels, the inhabitants of the heaven and the earth, even the ants in their hole and the fish invoke blessing on him who teaches men what is good."³⁶

Islam encourages the believers to spread the gospel of knowledge but at the same time it firmly believes in the imperative

necessity of utility, honesty and purity in the cultivation and advancement of knowledge; it does not subscribe to the concept of knowledge for the sake of knowledge.³⁷ Knowledge which brings no good to its possessor or to person around him is like a treasure from which nothing is spent.³⁸ Obviously, such a treasure is of no use to anyone. A learned person who knowingly conceals something about the religion has been warned of dire consequences.³⁹

Knowledge in Islam is viewed so sacred that its acquisition and use for merely worldly gains is regarded highly objectionable. According to a *hadith* reciters of Quran who visit princes for gaining worldly advantages are most contemptible in the eyes of God.⁴⁰ The real use of knowledge lies in seeking the pleasure of God and in teaching and guiding the ignorant. Acquisition of knowledge for ostentation, disputation and attracting people is reprehensible in Islam.⁴¹

To Islam the source and the end of all knowledge is Allah who is all-Knowing (*al Aleem*). This knowledge has been transmitted to the mankind through His different successive Prophets, as the true teachers and educators, and has finally reached culmination in the teachings of the final Prophet of Islam. The teachings of the Prophets of God are eternal, and are a source of perennial truth and cannot be substituted or altered.⁴²

Islam is, thus, credited with bringing to the world a concept of knowledge and a system of education and character-building the like of which, the world had never seen and has not surpassed it up till now. Contrary to the ill-informed, general belief Islam lays more emphasis on knowledge than on worship and regards the learned superior to the devout. It enjoins every Muslim to seek and impart knowledge, not for its own sake but for a better-living in this world and a more blissful and eternal life in the world-hereafter.

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3. The Quran, 2:282.
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5. For example the following verses may be cited:
 "Lo the worst of the beast in Allah's sight are the deaf and dumb who have no sense" (8:22)
 "lo in the creation of the heavens and the earth and (in) the difference of night and day are tokens (of His sovereignty) for men of understanding". (3:190).
6. The Quran, 2:22.
7. The Quran, 91:2.
8. The Quran, 31:31-32.
9. The Quran, 91:1.
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30. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 42.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
35. *Ibid.*, p. 59.
36. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
37. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
38. *Ibid.*, p. 63.
39. "Abu Huraira reported God's messenger as saying, he who asked about something he knows and conceals it will have a bridle of fire put on him on the day of resurrection—Ahmad, Abu Dawud and Trimidhi transmitted it and Ibn Maja transmitted it from Anas". *Ibid.*, p. 55.
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Education Under the Prophet

THE PROPHET AS A TEACHER

Tritton says, "Prophets rule the minds and bodies of nobles and the crowd; kings rule the bodies of nobles and the crowd; the wise rule the minds of nobles and preachers rule the mind of the crowd."¹

The power and influence of a Prophet is evident from Tritton's above-mentioned assessment. Muhammad, the last Prophet of Islam, ruled the minds and hearts of his followers as none before or after him has done. However, it is not our purpose here to discuss his multidimensional personality or to ascertain the influence it exercised on various aspects and areas of human life and society. Our purpose here is to discuss only one aspect of his personality—that which is connected with education. We have to consider the importance he attached to education, the aims and objectives he set for it, the various educational and quasi-educational institutions which came to be established under his influence and inspiration.

The Prophet of Islam was an educationist and a teacher in the widest and truest sense of the word. He was a teacher par-excellence. There are few in human history who have exercised as much influence on human mind and character and revolutionized the way of life so thoroughly as he succeeded in doing. In a way, the world has not seen a greater revolutionary, crusader for social change and justice, institution-builder, and the educator of public opinion and life than him. His civilizing influence on men and morals runs through history and is eternal.

The Prophet remained a teacher all through his life. He taught his people the basic values of new civilization that he was establishing; he taught them Islam; he taught his followers all that they needed for the betterment of this life and the life hereafter. And all

7
this he achieved, nor through preaching alone but through the example of his own practice. This was not all. Though he himself was *ummi*—unlettered, he taught his followers the importance of the acquisition of literacy, learning and knowledge. And it was under his dynamic guidance and inspiring leadership that a community of almost illiterate, ignorant person turned into the torch-bearers of knowledge and learning, culture and civilization, and spread out to the nooks and corners of the world. Though the Prophet's teaching was based on oral instructions it laid the firm foundation of education through written materials.

As far as the question of the very high value and importance he attached to education is concerned, there are instance galore to illustrate it. For example, the Prophet assigned some of the captives of the battle of Badr to educate ten children each one.² Thus, he fixed their ransom to teach the art of reading and writing to the children of Islamic society. It is also reported that the Prophet once came upon two groups of people in his mosque *Masjid al-Nabawi* who were engaged in two different kinds of activities—the one was praying and the other was having some sholarly discussion on some subject—and observed: "They are both engaged in what is good, but one of them is superior to the other. These ones are praying and supplicating God who, if He wills, may answer their prayer, but, if He wills, may refuse them. Those ones are learning knowledge and teaching the ignorant, so they are superior. I was sent only as teacher."³ Then, the Prophet joined the group of learned men.⁴ Semaan remarks, "His activity was not only that of a Prophet, as we know such activity from Biblical sources, but also among other functions that of a teacher in classical sense".⁵ Tibawi declares that though the message of the Prophet was for the whole of humanity for all times to come, as he himself claimed, but those who believed in his mission and were taught by him personally were really fortunate and more privileged than others. He did not expect any return or reward for his pains; he did it only for the sake of God.⁶ While Ibrahim and Ismail were raising the foundation of Kaba, Ibrahim prayed, "Raise up in their midst a messenger from among them who shall recite unto them Thy revelations and shall instruct them in the scripture and in wisdom and shall make them grow."⁷ It is believed that Prophet was the fulfilment of this prayer. Royster remarks that the Prophet's authority as a teacher is based, in the mind of

Muslims, on his Ascension (*Meraj*). This journey disclosed to him the reality of man and universe and gave him true knowledge.⁸ He further says that the Prophet's success as a teacher is acclaimed by Husayn: "The trust and maxims, the precepts which from time to time during the past twenty years the Prophet had delivered to his followers, were imprinted on their hearts and were the ruling principles of actions."⁹ All that the Prophet said or did, his followers took to heart and tried to follow faithfully in word and deed.

Teaching is entirely unworthy if it is not put into practice. First of all a teacher should translate his teachings into practice. The success of the Prophet lies in the fact that while he presented some ideals, he at the same time actualised them. There is no single ordinance or injunction in the Quran that he did not practice. First of all he himself practiced these teachings of the Quran then he taught and conveyed them to others.¹⁰ In his Farewell Sermon, he is reported to have said: "I am leaving something which if one holds fast to it, will never fall into error—the book of God and my *Sunnah*—so give good heed to what I say".¹¹ This is why there exists a desire in Muslims to learn the Prophet's saying and to imitate his character, actions and qualities.

The Arabs laid great stress on purity of language and it was greatly prized by them. We have already seen that the pre-Islamic period was an era of great literary output especially in the field of poetry and oration. This output was marked for its extraordinary felicity and beauty. It was due to this keen interest in the language and its literature that the poets and orators enjoyed such a predominant influence on the mind of the people. The Prophet as a teacher excelled even in this field; he surpassed even the best among them. The command he enjoyed over the language was extraordinary. His sayings and orations are considered to be the best specimens of the purity, beauty and excellence of language after the language of Quran. Once he himself pronounced that he was the most eloquent person among the Arabs.¹² As a teacher also he maintained the same standard. Once in his presence an Arab made an idiomatic error about which he addressed his Companions and said "instruct your brother as he has strayed."¹³ It was this interest in maintaining the highest standards of language, and also the example set by Quran, which inspired the Muslim to demonstrate unprecedented activity in the field of literature.

Prophet's interest in education was not confined to verbal instruction only. He is reported to have evinced keen interest in the practical education of his people and suggested many improvements in the method of writing. Some serious defects which badly affected the style of writing he advised them to be removed in the cause of betterment of the script. The Prophet instructed his students to dry the ink on the paper with the use of dust. He also suggested to write the letter *Seen* with its three curves () and not with a single stroke () because one who writes with a single stroke shows his carelessness and laziness in the art of writing.¹⁴

Hameedullah believes that the Prophet first started the method of *raqsh* (literally meaning putting dots) to distinguish between letters having similar shapes. Before the application of *raqsh* the Arabic scripts was very defective.¹⁵

HIS METHOD OF TEACHING

The Prophet was basically a teacher and remained so throughout. The assumption of the responsibilities of the head of the Islamic State, therefore, could not prevent him from devoting a considerable portion of his time to teaching and instructing his followers. He used to lecture regularly to his Companions who gathered round him after prayer to be instructed in religion. They were free to question him on all matter especially on faith and on human conduct. His method of teaching was based on repetition. When he wanted to emphasize something he used to repeat it three times in order to make sure that the audience fully grasped and understood the import and meaning of the teaching.¹⁶ This technique of teaching has been described in the following *hadith*: "Anas said that when the Prophet made a statement he repeated it three times so that it would be understood, and that when he met a company and gave them a salutation he did it three times"¹⁷ Repetition induces retention and fuller comprehension. The Prophet, however, took care not to tax his followers to the extent that caused fatigue or led to the loss of interest in the subject they were being taught.¹⁸ This method was maintained by his followers after him as is evident from the following *hadith*:

"Shaqiq said that Abdullah b. Masud used to exhort the people every Thursday. A man said 'I wish Abu Abdar-Rahman¹⁹ that you

would give us a daily exhortation.' He replied, 'my dislike of wearying you prevents me from that so I am considerate in my exhortations to you as God's Messenger was to us for fearing of causing us aversion'.²⁰

From the point of view of education, the personality of teacher is of crucial importance. If the teacher embodies and reflects the values he is teaching then the impression he leaves on his pupils is very deep and indelible. The success of the Prophet as a teacher lies in the fact that he practiced whatever he taught to others and, as such was the model for his Companions, both in profession and practice. Once Ayesha was asked about his conduct. She replied that his conduct was Quran i.e., Quran was fully exemplified in his conduct.²¹

SCRIBES, QURRA AND HUFFAZ

After the revelation of each passage of Quran the Prophet recited it to those of his Companions who happened to be present at that time and it was committed to writing by some one of them upon palm-leaves, leather, bark or any other such hard and easily available material.²² Among these scribes some like Ali and Usman, were occasional while others were specially assigned this task, and hence came to be designated as official scribes. To the latter category belonged Zaid Ibn Thabit,²³ who had also learned Hebrew for the purpose of correspondence with Jews.²⁴ There is however, difference of opinion about the actual number of these scribes. Some maintain that their number was fourteen,²⁵ while others believe it to be twenty four or even forty two. Hafiz Ibn Hajar Asqalani, the renowned traditionist mentions the name of scribes of the Prophet and says that their number was no less than forty two.²⁶ Tabari has carefully listed the names of those who used to write Quranic verses revealed to the Prophet. According to him they were Ali bin Abi Talib, Usman bin Affan, Umar bin al-As bin Umayyah, Muawiyah bin Abi Sufyan, Sharjeel bin Hasan, Abdullah bin Saad bin Abi Sarah, Mughaira bin Shaaba, Muaz bin Jabal, Zaid bin Sabit, Hanzla bin al-Rabi', Abi bin Ka'ab, Juhaim bin Sallat and Husain un-Nameri.²⁷ It is reported that the Prophet appointed Abdullah bin Sayeed bin As to teach the art of calligraphy with a view to prepare some scribes to write down the divine message.²⁸ Muawiyah, one of the Prophet's scribes, took great interest in

spreading knowledge during his caliphate.²⁹ Among the scribes of the Prophet, Abdullah bin Amr is well-known who himself says that he used to write everything he heard from the Prophet and about whom the Prophet's close Companion, Abu Huraira, says that he did not record the words of the Prophet as Abdullah recorded them.³⁰

After the migration of the Prophet to al-Madina and establishment of the Islamic state there the work of scribes naturally increased. As a result quite a large number of scribes were engaged, with specific duties to perform. While some of them were especially employed for transcribing the Quranic revelations, others were engaged in preparing drafts of official letters to be submitted for the approval of the Prophet. There were several other categories, some maintained accounts of *Zakat* and other state revenues, some kept the accounts of articles and material things acquired during war period in the form of booty. Some were appointed with an eye on corresponding with foreigners. Among them was Zaid Ibn Thabit who knew Greek, Persian, Coptic, Abyssinian and Hebrew languages. He also acted as an interpreter of the Prophet.³¹ More than 200 letters of the Prophet have survived and many more must have been lost. The use of seal on official letters for the purpose of authentication was not known to the Arabs before the Prophet. It was for the first time used in Arab history by him.³²

The Quran was revealed to the Prophet in its complete form in a period of twenty three years. For twenty three years, therefore, the Prophet kept his chosen companions on the job of scribing the holy scripture bit by bit as it was being revealed. Besides preserving it in written form, the companions of the Prophet also learnt it by heart to doubly ensure its authentic preservation. As a result, at the time of the death of Prophet there were good many of his companions who had memorised Quran in full—in the pure and original form in which it was revealed to the Prophet verse by verse. Moreover, there were hundreds of others who had memorised different and specific parts of the Quran. Those who had memorised the Quran by heart were known as *Huffaz* and *Qurra*.³³ Leone Caetani says that the Prophet had come to create a special category of person especially instructed and well-versed in the Quranic text as it was revealed. They were called *Qurra*. So long as the Prophet lived he was the prime source of the divine knowledge and provided

guidance to every member of the community.³⁴ But after his death people increasingly turned to *Qurra* for instruction in the Quran. Tibawi states that a number of *Qurra* were unable to write what they retained in their breasts. These *qurra* and *huffaz*, however, played very important role not only in the dissemination of Quranic knowledge but also in its preservation after the death of the Prophet.

DARUL ARQAM

During the early Makkan period when Islam had not yet succeeded in attracting sufficient number of followers and had not yet gained enough strength to make it possible for Muslims to openly propagate their religion, both the missionary activities and the work of training and education of the new converts was mainly confined to privacy in houses. Among such houses which served as the centres of missionary activities as well as of training for the new community and the diffusion of Islamic teachings, Darul Arqam occupies a very distinguished place. Many renowned companions of the Prophet embraced Islam in it and received their first instruction here. Al-Arqam was among the very early Muslims and it was about 614 A.D. that he presented his house situated at the Safa mountain to the Prophet for carrying on activities related to the spread of Islam. Until the acceptance of Islam by Hazrat Umar when the Muslims felt themselves strong enough to openly propagate their mission, this house served as the main centre of the activities of the new community. As such, it was here that the people desiring to enter the fold of Islam reported and were instructed in the fundamentals of the new religion. In this way Darul Arqam can be designated as the first Islamic educational institution of its own kind. Hazrat Umar was probably the last person to have received instruction in it. After his conversion the sort of secrecy required earlier was no more needed and hence Darul Arqam lost its main function and its importance as the centre of missionary and training activities declined.³⁵

It may be noted here that though Darul Arqam was the first centre of education for the early Muslims where the Prophet personally instructed his followers, it was by no means the only place where Muslims were getting education. Obviously as every Muslim was eager to gather as much knowledge about his faith as possible, and to learn Quran, he availed every possible opportunity

of it that came his way. For example, we know that just on the eve of his conversion Hazrat Umar found his sister secretly studying Quran along with another companion at her own house. For all that we know there might have been many other such houses where individuals received their instruction. But their number will largely be a matter of speculation in the absence of evidence.³⁶

KUTTAB

It would appear from the evidence contained in the sources that the words *al-Kuttab*³⁷ (plural *Katatib*) and *al-Maktab* (Plural, *al-Makatib*) were used for schools even in the early days of Islam, and there is, therefore, reason to believe that educational institutions with these names existed under the Prophet in Madina. A report related to Salman al-Farsi and contained in *Tarikh Baghdad* would seem to suggest that, *Kuttab* existed in Makka before Prophet's migration from there as he speaks of having attended a Persian *Kuttab* During that period. It is however, quite possible that Salman used this word which came to be known to him during a later period at Madina and which was familiar to his audience, to designate an institution which he had attended. Even Munjiruddin who had made much of this report would appear to agree with this interpretation.³⁸ Surely if such an institution had existed in the Makkan period of the Prophet's life it must have been noticed in other sources as well, for existence of such an institution would clearly means its pre-Islamic origin about which there is absolutely no evidence.

It would appear that there used to be two categories of *Kuttab*, firstly the *kuttab* for teaching Quran and elementary religious knowledge, and, secondly, the *Kuttab* for teaching reading and writing. There appears to be some confusion on this point and scholars have generally failed to distinguish between the two and they would seem to think that both the functions were performed by one and the same type of school (*Kuttab*). However, in view of the evidence available on this point, this interpretation cannot be accepted.³⁹

MOSQUES

Though education was imparted and people were taught in many private houses, for holding regular study circles these places

were not very suitable. For such mosques were eminently suitable as they were easily accessible to all who wished to attend them.⁴⁰

Shortly after arriving at Madina the Prophet built a mosque, known as *Masjid al-Nabawi*, which soon became not only a place of worship but also a centre of education.⁴¹ The Prophet used to teach at this mosque in al-Madina. These teaching sessions were generally held in the afternoon. As it was not possible for the women to attend these sessions, one day in every week was exclusively reserved for their instruction. The Prophet thus paid due attention to the education of women, though co-education was not there. He also encouraged adult-education.

In these regular daily sessions for men and weekly session for women the Prophet used to instruct them in various aspects of religion and taught them their duties and responsibilities as member of the Islamic society. In these teaching-learning sessions and discussions that followed, the disciples and followers of the Prophet were free to put questions and raise issues regarding any and every thing concerning their lives. After his death this practice was continued by his companions.⁴²

The mosque of the Prophet (*Masjid al-Nabawi*) was the central educational institution of that day. Besides providing education to the people of Madina, it also looked after the educational requirement of the people of other regions. Members and representatives of the tribes that embraced Islam used to go there for getting educated and trained in religious and other matters. For example, delegation of the tribes of *Banu A'mir* and *Banu Tameem* went there with 80 representatives to be educated in Islam. In the time of the Prophet there were nine mosques in Madina and each one of them served as an educational institution. The people living in the neighbourhood sent their children to these local mosques for education. The Prophet sometimes went to Quba. The Prophet personally taught Hazrat Umar and many others of his companions. They attended classes in the Mosque of the Prophet and learned the Quran and Islamic sciences. The Prophet made it a point to inspect the study circles based in different mosques and to correct wrongs if any. According to *Tirmidhi* once, the Prophet heard a discussion going on in his Mosque in which the subject of predestination was being unduly debated. He angrily came out of his room attached to the Mosque and forbade the futile discussion, remarking that the

earlier nations had perished because they indulged in such sterile and futile discussions.⁴³ The Prophet, practical and realist that he was, thus discouraged ungainly activities and hairsplitting discussions for the sake of discussions wasting time and energy.

SUFFAH

In one part of the Prophet's Mosque there was a thatched platform called Suffah. This was for the lodging of new comers and for those local people who were poor and had no house to live in. Hameedullah calls it the first Residential University of Islam. The resident students of this institution earned their livelihood by working outside as casual labourers. This residential institution was maintained not only for the regular boarders but also for the day scholars and casual visitors who came for education and stayed back for short durations. Students from far-off places and belonging to distant tribes used to come and stay at Suffah for some periods and then went back after learning religious sciences. The Prophet himself took keen interest and great pains in managing the educational institution and the boarding house of Suffah. The companions of the Prophet, trained in Suffah, were sent out as heads of delegations of tribes to organise education in different regions. These trained persons were often called *Qari*.

Readings, writing, *tajwid* (the correct pronouncing and recital of Quran) and other Islamic sciences formed the syllabi of Islamic education imparted under the direct guidance and supervision of the Prophet.⁴⁴ Shibli estimates that about 400 people attended Suffah at one time or the other. Of course such a vast number of people could not have possibly attended Suffah at a time, for, the accommodation available would not have allowed it. So this must be the total number of the people attached to Suffah at one time or the other.⁴⁵

The number of boarders at Suffah varied from time to time and as records show, probably the maximum number of resident-students any given time was not more than eighty.⁴⁶ Some of the distinguished students of Suffah were the following: Abu 'Ubaida bin A'mir bin Jarrah, Suhaib bin Sanan, Abdullah bin Umar, Abdullah bin Zaid Hussaini, Abdullah bin Masud, Zaid bin Khattab, Salman Farsi, Belal bin A'mar, Abu Huraira Abdur Rahman al-Ausi, Khubab bin Urs, Utba bin Masud Hazli, Abu-Dawud, Salim

Maula Abi Huzaifa, Abuzar Ghafari, Abu Darda, Ibn Umm Maktum, Hanzla bin Abi Amir, Saad bin Abi Waqas, Huzaifa, bin Yaman.⁴⁷ Contributions of these scholars to the cause of Islamic science and learning are too well-known to need any more details here. Among the teachers appointed by the Prophet to impart instruction to the students engaged in various specializations, was Abdullah Ibn Sa'id Ibn al-'As who was a calligraphist with some excellence and was well known even in the pre-Islamic period as a *Katib* (the scribe). He was appointed as an instructor to teach the art of penmanship. Ubada Ibn as-Samit was also appointed by the Prophet to teach the students of Suffah the art of writing and impart knowledge of the Quran.⁴⁸ He says that during his tenure as a teacher at Suffah one of the students presented him a bow but the Prophet commanded him not to accept it. This would suggest that education was free and no fee or its equivalent was charged from the students.⁴⁹

DAR AL-QURRA

There is also some evidence in the *Tabqat Ibn Sad* and *Isti'ad* of Ibn Abd al Bar to suggest that besides *Suffah* there was another residential school known as *Dar al-qurra*. This institution is reported to be functioning in Madina at the house of Ibn Naufah during 2H/623 A.D. But, unfortunately, further details about it are not available.⁵⁰

FEMALE EDUCATION

The place and role of women in the Islamic society through the centuries has, as a subject of study, attracted the attention of an increasing number of western and oriental scholars in the recent times and had led to some unseemly and bitter controversies. It is beyond the scope of the present study to go into those controversies or to enter into any discussion on the status of women in Islam. Suffice to say that it is historically well-established that Islam assigned to women a place of honour in an age when the birth of a girl in the family was considered to be a disgrace to avoid which people often buried their daughters alive.⁵¹ Islam which came as a corrective to many established social evils, stood up against this heinous crime against women and restored them to their rightful place in the society. Islam, thus, gave its women a personality and

a social status which remained the envy of women elsewhere for many many centuries to come.

In the newly-established-Islamic society the acquisition of knowledge became incumbent both on men and women,⁵² through in accordance with the Islamic philosophy of life, education for women was in several respects different from education for men and, was conducted separately. The Prophet has fixed a day exclusively for female education and this was Wednesday. On that particular day he used to lecture and discuss women's problems in the Masjid al-Nabawi. Women were permitted to ask anything about the religion. Abu Sayeed narrates that the Prophet adopted this practice in response to a complaint from women who felt that they did not have enough opportunity to learn from him. As a result a day was fixed exclusively for them.⁵³ They were also provided vocational guidance especially in spinning⁵⁴ and wool-carding⁵⁵ as these were regarded as the skills and occupations most suited them.

As a result of this policy women took to acquisition of knowledge in a big way. This did not remain confined to gaining knowledge for tackling their day-to-day religious problems but went many steps beyond, touching in some cases the shores of scholarship. Al-Baladuri reports that in the earliest period of Islam there were five Arab ladies who could read and write. They were Hafsa bint Umar, Umm Kulthum bint Uqbah, Aishah bint Sad, Karimah bint al-Miqdad and al-Shifa bint Abdullah al-Adawiyah. Al-Shifa had taught Hafsa and the Prophet asked her to continue teaching Hafsa, even after he married her. This arrangement suggests that the responsibility of educating the women was assigned to women and men were not involved. There is no evidence to indicate that girls joined the *Kuttab* or the women received education along with men. Some scholars like, Khalil Tutah who hold the view that men and women studied together have based their conclusions on some evidence contained in al-Aghani to the effect that the ladies joined the *Kuttab* with men. But no such evidence is available in the sources at least about the early period. It would, therefore, be risky to depend on such a weak and scanty evidence for drawing a conclusion of such a serious nature.⁵⁶ Surely the concept of co-education where free mixing of boys and girls in their adolescent years is allowed, does not conform with the high ideals of Islam. Free mixing in any and every form, especially

in educational institutions of grown up boys and girls, is strictly forbidden in Islam. That is why women have been exempted from the obligation of Friday prayer, funeral prayer and *Jihad*. It was also because of this that the Prophet had fixed one day in the week exclusively for the education of women in the *Masjid al-Nabawi* which had, and still has, a door known as *Bab al-Nisa*.

CURRICULUM

It would be too much to expect adoption of set courses and fixed syllabi in the educational institutions of those early days when education as a science and system had not yet sufficiently developed even outside Arabia. Evidences indicate that no uniform pattern and curriculum was followed in the Islamic educational institutions. However, some rough and general idea can be formed about the nature of the curriculum which was generally followed during those early days. Naturally, in the Islamic scheme of education Quran occupied the central place as it formed the source of all knowledge. Great care was taken and much emphasis laid on the correct reading and recitation of Quran and on acquiring Quranic knowledge. This was closely followed by teaching of *Sunnah* which is in effect and elaboration and a practical demonstration of the Quran.⁵⁷ Quran and *Sunnah* formed the two primary and basic subjects of study. It goes, however, without saying that learning of reading and writing generally formed one of the main components of the curriculum, though there were also people who studied Quran and *Sunnah* orally and had no need to read and write. Rudiments of medicine,⁵⁸ astrology, astronomy,⁵⁹ genealogy,⁶⁰ the practical phonetic for correct recitation of Quran⁶¹ and calligraphy⁶² were some of the subjects included in the curriculum. Some knowledge of mathematics⁶³ was also desirable as it was required for the proper distribution of inherited wealth and properties.

Fiqh, as a distinct subject, had not yet emerged but its beginning can be discerned during the Prophet's own time. For all practical purposes, however, it was included in the study of Quran and *Sunnah*. There can be no doubt that the study of the problems which were later to form the subject-matter of *fiqh* was one of the main concerns of the Muslims.⁶⁴ Besides these intellectual pursuits emphasis was also laid on learning the necessary skills of the age such as horsemanship,⁶⁵ shooting,⁶⁶ wrestling,⁶⁷ swimming.⁶⁸

A persual of the curriculum delineated above would lead to the impression that it was quite adequate and balanced and served well the religious intellectual, and the physical needs and requirements of the people for whom it was meant. If we keep in mind the condition in which it was conceived and implemented, it would appear to be a great achievement. It may, however, be remembered that all these subjects were not taught at all or in any one single institutions;⁶⁹ they, in fact constituted the total number of subjects taught at different institutions of the times.

It would appear that a general criterion existed and the minimum qualification for passing out as a learned man (*fiqh*) was recognised. In a *hadith* the Prophet laid down preservation of forty *ahadith* by a person as the minimum qualification for being recognised as a *faqih*.⁷⁰

It is evident from the above discussion that the different subjects taught in the educational institutions during the Prophet's time were not given equal importance and status. There are evidences to show that the main core part of Islamic education consisted of the learning of Quran, *hadith* and the obligatory duties of a Muslim. This minimum and compulsory knowledge was expected of all those who wished to go in the world as learned and devout Muslims. Of course there was no bar on seeking further knowledge about other sciences but it was optional and not compulsory.⁷¹

SPECIALIZATION AND DIVERSIFICATION OF COURSES

Some of those who devoted themselves to these studies over a period of time developed their particular interests in them which led to specialization in various subjects of the curriculum. Specialization in different subjects had, thus, developed under the Prophet and there were specialists available for imparting instruction in the various subjects of Islamic curriculum such as Quranic knowledge, *tajwid* (method of correct recitation of the Quran), mathematics of dividing heritage and Islamic law. Along with specialization there was also diversification of courses in keeping with individual interests and aptitude. The Prophet urged his people to choose any of the subjects according to their aptitude and also pointed towards the person who could guide them in that particular field.⁷²

ORGANIZATION AND SUPERVISIONS

The Islamic State which was initially confined to Madina was later extended to the length and breadth of Arabia. Increasingly large number of people embraced Islam and declared their allegiance to the Prophet. Many of them came to Madina in the form of delegations to be taught and trained by the Prophet. But it was not possible for them to stay and study there for long for the lack of accommodation and other facilities. Nor the Prophet thought it advisable for them to concentrate in Madina and stay away from their places and families for long periods of time. It was thought necessary therefore to popularise education by adding centres of education in the length and breadth of the Islamic state. In such a situation an extensive programme of organising and supervising educational activities was undertaken. This beginning was, however, made at Madina. It would seem that during the early period at Madina it was the general policy of the Prophet to encourage the persons who accepted Islam, to migrate to Madina, where, in some cases, they were provided even with land to build houses and settle down permanently. The arrangement not only added to the community's military strength—considered crucially important in those days—but also proved highly advantageous from the point of view of education. Imparting education at a centralized place like Madina was much easier, administratively and cost-wise than it would have been in scattered and far-flung areas of the Islamic State. Therefore, in the early stages centralization was encouraged. But later when the Islamic State gained sufficient strength and administrative control and viability, the policy of centralization gave way to decentralization in increasing degrees. Ibn S'ad records that once a teacher appointed by the Prophet to the people of a recently converted tribe, asked them, apparently in conformity with the general policy of the Prophet, to migrate to Madina and also added: "Whoso does not migrate, his Islam is no Islam and he will be treated as an unbeliever". The tribesmen disagreed with him and sent a delegation up to the Prophet to apprise him of the difficulties they would face if migration to Madina, the capital of the state.⁷³

Subsequently, it became the normal practice with the Prophet to send teachers to the tribes who embraced Islam to teach the basic requirements of the religion and possibly to educate them in the

skill and art of reading and writing. It was in pursuance of this policy that seventy of the best Quran-knowers were sent to *Bir Ma'unah* because they had to educate a large tribe.⁷⁴ There is evidence to the effect that many teachers were sent to Najran and Yemen.⁷⁵ It is also historically proved that the Prophet appointed six teachers for the tribes *Qara* and *Azal*.⁷⁶ After the conquest to Makka the Prophet ordered Muaz to stay on and organize and impart education to the converted people.⁷⁷ It was the normal practice of the Prophet that whenever he sent a *wali* (governor) to any region newly conquered or converted to Islam, he also sent with him another person for the diffusion of Islamic knowledge.⁷⁸ This practice of dispatching missionary teachers was not confined to urban areas only; teachers were sent to rural areas as well to teach the nomadic and isolated people.⁷⁹

The duties of the governor, among others, included the organization and maintenance of the educational institutions in the region. When Amr bin Hazam was appointed as the governor of Yemen he was given a written document enlisting his duties in this regard. Fortunately this document has been preserved and it gives a clear idea of the duties and functions of a governor of a Islamic State. These included organization and development of education and proper dissemination of knowledge. He was ordered to instruct Muslims in the Islamic sciences, the Quran, the *hadith* and *fiqh*. In this written document it was said: "And persuade people to take religious lore". Hameedullah had taken it to mean the possibility of the existence of secular subjects in the educational system of the period. This inference, however, appears to be a bit far-fetched. The governor-cum-teacher was made responsible to teach obligatory practices like ablution, bath, congregational services, fasting and pilgrimage to Kabah.⁸⁰

To ensure proper functioning of the educational institutions the Prophet sometimes also appointed inspecting officers. According to the historian al-Tabari, Muaz ibn Jabal was one of those appointed for this purpose. He was a touring officer who went from district to district ostensibly with a view to organize and supervise the educational institutions under his jurisdiction.⁸¹ Hameedullah has designated him as Inspector General of education.⁸²

It is evident from the above discussion that at the time when the Prophet received his call, even though education was not

entirely unknown to the Arabs, there was no educational system worth the name. Islam, therefore, evolved a system of education most suited to the need of the spread of its message and mission. It laid great emphasis on the acquisition of true knowledge and its speedy diffusion. The Prophet himself took keen personal interest in the education of his followers. As a result, within a very short period the entire situation changed and in a country where only a few years back people familiar with the art of reading and writing could be counted on one's fingers, came up a multitude of people well-versed in this art. Besides the Prophet's Mosque and the Suffah where instruction was imparted under the personal supervision of the Prophet, there were available other avenues and institutions such as *kuttab*. Other mosques at Madina also served as centres of education. Besides, some individuals imparted education at their own houses. It should also be kept in mind that this education was not confined to men alone; women also benefited from it. As far as the syllabi is concerned main emphasis was naturally laid on the Quran and *Sunnah* followed by other subjects, relevant to the requirements of the community. It would appear from the evidence available that even in those early days the Prophet could organize an educational programme in a systematic manner, including arrangements for periodic supervision. Thus, foundation for the future educational expansion were already laid during the lifetime of the Prophet himself. The Prophet who was himself an 'Ummi' (unlettered) thus evolved and put into practice a system of education which has been flourishing and benefiting the succeeding generation of his followers.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Tritton, A.S., *Materials on Muslim Education in the Middle Ages*, p. 77.
2. *Musnad Ahmad, Tabqat Ibn Saad*, vide Tashimul Quran Vol. V, p. 18.
3. *Mishkat al-Masabih*, Vol. I, p. 59.
4. Sayeed Akhter : *Hamara Nizam-e-Taleem*, Lahore, p. 9.
5. Semaan 'Education in Islam from Jahiliyyah to Ibn Khuldun', p. 188.
6. Tibawi, 'Muslim Education in the golden age of Caliphate', p. 419.
7. The Quran 2:129.
8. James E. Royster : 'Muhammad as Teacher and Exemplar', *Muslim World*, Oct. 1978, p. 236.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 240.
10. *Tabqat Ibn Saad* (IIm) Vol. I, p. 364.

11. Hādith Transmitted by *Bukhari* and *Muslim* as quoted by Mohammad Farooq Khan in *Kalam-e-Nabuwwar*; Markazi Maktaba Islami Delhi, 1977, p. 32.
12. Qazi Ayaz; *Shifa*, p. 59 as quoted by Raghib al-Tabbakh. *As-Saqafatul Islamia*, Urdu Translation, Markazi Maktaba Islami, Delhi, p. 387, 1983.
13. Shalaby: p. 42.
14. Hameedullah: 'Educational System in the Time of the Prophet', *Muslim World*, Jan., 1939, p. 56.
15. *Sahifah Hamman ibn Munabbih*, p. 8.
16. *Semaan*, p. 192.
17. *Mishkat al-Masabih* Vol. I, p. 52.
18. Tritton, A.S.: *Materials on Muslim Education in the Middle Ages*, p. 66.
19. Abdar-Rahman was the *Kunniya* of Abdullah b. Masud.
20. *Mishkat al-Masabih*, Vol. I, p. 52.
21. Ibn Sad, *Tabqat* (Ilm) Vol. I, p. 364, also see, Maududi, *Nezam-e-Taleem ki Islami Tashkeel-e-Jadid*, p. 8; Muniruddin, *Muslim Scholar and Social Status*, p. 29 and p. 36; Muhammad Qutub, *Nezam-e-Taleem ki Islami Tashkeel-e-Jadid*, p. 18.
22. *Al Fathur Rabbani Le-Tarteeb Musnad al-Iman Ahmad bin Hanbal al-Shibani* compiled by Ahmad Abdul Rahman al-Banna. Cairo, Vol. XVIII, p. 29-30, also see Shibli, *al-Farooque* Vol. II, p. 116.
23. Suyuti, vide *as-Saqafatul Islamia*, Urdu tr., pp. 132-33.
24. Educational System in the Time of the Prophet, p. 57.
25. Waqidi vide Muir, *The Life of Muhammad*, p. XIV.
26. Vide, Zewmer, p. 347.
27. *Tarikh Tabari*, urdu tr. by Abdullah al-Ammadi, Maktaba Razzaqi, Karachi, 1949, p. 91.
28. Reyasat Ali Nadvi, 'Islami Nezam-e-Taleem', *Maarif*, Feb. 1938, p. 116..
29. *Semaan*, K.H., p. 129.
30. Tibawi, p. 421.
31. Hameedullah, *Sahifah Hamam Ibn Munabbih*, p. 12.
32. Hameedullah; 'Educational System in the Time of the Prophet', p. 56.
33. Jerajpuri, Aslam; *Tarikh-ul-Ummat*, Vol. II, p. 182.
34. Uthman and the recension of the Quran, *Muslim World*, Oct., 1915, pp. 282-83.
35. Ibn Saad 3/1:172 to 174.
36. Tihawi, p. 418.
37. For reference to Kuttab of the early Islamic period see, Ilm, 7a; Sad iv, 1, 59.
38. Muniruddin: p. 14.
39. Shalaby: p. 17.
40. *Ibid.* p. 29.
41. Sayeed Akhter: p. 13.
42. Afendi and Baloch: *Curriculum and Teacher Education* (Islamic Education Series), p. 143.
43. Hameedullah: Educational System in the Time of the Prophet, p. 55-56.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 54-55.
45. *Siratum Nabi*, Vol. I, p. 292.
46. Hameedullah; *Sahifah Hamam ibn Munabbih*, p. 9.
47. Hameedullah, *Ahad-e-Nabawi Ka Nizam-i-Taleem*, Hyderabad, 1976, p. 34; also see Syed Mohammad Aqbal Ashab-i-Suffah, Rafeeqe Patna, Sept., Oct., 82, p. 30.
48. Hameedullah: *Sahifah Hamman*, p. 9.
49. Hameedullah; Educational System in the Time of the Prophet, p. 57.
50. Hameedullah: *Sahifah Hamman*, p. 10.
51. Interpreting the Quranic verses "And when the girl-child that was buried alive is asked for what sin she was slain, (81:8-9)", Maududi mentions on the authority of *Sunan Darimi* that a man, in the presence of the Prophet, stated an event of his

Jahiliyyah period as to how he had pushed his daughter into a well to get rid of her.
Tafhim-ul Quran, Vol. VI, p. 265.

52. Baihaqi, as quoted by Sayeed Akhter; p. 10.
53. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
54. Hameedullah: Educational System in the Time of the Prophet, p. 58.
55. Goldziher, vide Shalaby p. 19.
56. Shalaby: p. 190.
57. "With clear proof and writings and we have revealed unto thee the Remembrance that thou mayst explain to mankind that which hath been revealed for them, and that happily they may reflect". The Quran 16:44.
58. Suyuti, vide Sayeed Akhter, p. 13.
59. Welmi; vide *Ibid.*,
60. *Sahih al-Bukhari*; vide *Ibid.*
61. *Abu Daud*; vide *Ibid.*
62. *Abu Daud*; vide *Ibid.*
63. Tabrani, vide *Ibid.*
64. Compare Muniruddin; *Muslim Education and Scholars' Social Status*, p. 38.
65. *Jama-ul-Jawame* vide Sayeed Akhter, p. 13.
66. *Jama-ul-Jawame* vide *Ibid.*
67. Abu Naeem vide *Ibid.*
68. Abu Naeem vide *Ibid.*
69. Sayeed Akhter; p. 13.
70. Abu Darda said "If anyone preserves for my people forty traditions concerning their religion, God will raise him up in the next world as a *faqih*" *Mishkat al-Masabih*, p. 59.
71. Abdallah b. Amr reported God's Messenger as saying, "Knowledge had three categories: a precise verse or an established *sunnah* or a firm obligatory duty. Any thin else is an extra". Abu Dawud and Ibn Maja transmitted this hadith, see *Mishkat al-Masabih*, p. 56-57.
72. Hameedullah: Educational System in the Time of the Prophet, p. 57.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
74. Shibli, *Siratun-Nabi*, Vol. I, p. 292; also see Azmi, *Studies in Early Hadith Literature*, p. 5
75. Azmi; p. 5
76. Sayeed Akhter; p. 13.
77. Shalaby: p. 116.
78. Afendi and Baloch: p. 143.
79. Semaan: p. 192.
80. Hameedullah: *Seasi Wasiqajat*; Majlis Taraqqi Adab Lahore, 1960, pp. 123-125; also his *Sahifah Hammam ibn Munabbih*, p. 11 and *Educational System in the Time of the Prophet*, p. 58-59.
81. Tarikh Tabari, *Tarkih arrusul wa al-Muluk*, Vol. 3 verified by Muhammad Abu Fazal Ibrahim, Darul Muarif Cairo, 1962, p. 318.
82. *Educational System in the Time of the Prophet*, p. 59.

Education Under the Pious Caliphate

The period of *Khilafat al-Rashida*, i.e. the period of the first four Caliphs of Islam, lasted thirty years from the Prophet's death, from 632 A.D. to 661 A.D. In this period the frontiers of the Islamic state extended far beyond the Arabian peninsula. Muslims overran the Persian empire of Chosroes and the Byzantine empire of Kaisar. Iraq, Persia, Palestine, Syria and Egypt were the lands of rich civilization and high culture, with well-established traditions of their own. These conquests proved rewarding in the sense that there started the process of synthesis between the culture and traditions of the conquered people and of the conquerors. New institutions were built and, wherever possible and feasible the existing institutions were suitably modified and used for furthering the aims and objectives of the pervading Faith. This, of course, included the educational institutions which were used to carry the message of the new Faith to every nook and corner of the conquered territories. No effort was spared in the gigantic task of educating and instructing the communities which were entering the fold of Islam.¹ Simultaneously, the conquerors realized the importance of learning the languages and sciences of the conquered nations and made every possible effort in that direction. An idea of how successful this process of cultural impregnation and interpenetration proved can be had from the fact that it became possible for the early *Umayyads*, under Abdul Malik to Arabicize the administration of the entire Islamic state. The problem facing them was not the mastering of any one language but of several languages with all the attendant difficulties. But it goes to their credit that they did it with remarkable ease and facility. It is clear that they were keen not only to educate people in their own faith but also exhibited astonishing interest in acquiring knowledge about other people's cultures, languages and sciences.²

It is neither possible nor necessary to go here into a detailed discussion of the motivations and the nature of the early Islamic conquests. One of the main motives, however, would seem to have been the urge and realization of their duty as the successor of the Prophet, to convey his message to people at large. They, therefore, traveled far and wide to teach the new religion and its application to practical life. Whenever any new territory was conquered, teachers were dispatched to instruct the populace there.

These missionary and educational activities relentlessly carried on by the advocates of Islam in the newly conquered lands paid rich dividends. While on the one hand a large number of the conquered people were attracted towards Islam and ultimately accepted it, on the other, it helped in the creation of an environment very conducive to the spread of education and learning. It was on this solid foundation laid down by the rightly guided Caliphs that the *Umayyads*, and later on the *Abbasids* built the magnificent super-structure of their unprecedented literary and academic achievements.

Madina being the metropolis of Islam during the period, and also the place of concentration of the Companions of the Prophet, it was only natural that it became the centre of academic pursuits and educational activities. Besides, there were numerous private circles where eminent companions of the Prophet gave discourses on various aspects of the Quran, *Sunnah*, *Fiqh* and other related subjects and where eager seekers after knowledge thronged from all directions. There also seems to have been established a formal educational institution which was known as *Majlis*. This institution served not only as the nucleus of the educational activities going on in Madina but also as a model for the educational institutions established in other regions. There are scholars who tend to believe that it were essentially the intellectual and academic activities of the *Majlis* which ultimately created conditions in which it became possible first to compile the chapters of the Quran and then turn to the *Hadith* literature.³

After the death of the Prophet, Abu Bakr, took his chair as the first caliph of Islam. But unfortunately, the period of his caliphate was very short and he had also to face a host of very formidable problems. Some tribes had turned apostate and some had refused to pay the *Zakat*. Moreover there were, like Mosaillema, some false

claimants to the office of prophethood. The whole of Arabia was in turmoil and Caliph Abu Bakr had to meet different kinds of challenges. The courage and determination with which he faced the situation had evoked the admiration of the successive generations. The process of consoling and consolidating the frontiers got him engaged in skirmishes. Later on, he had to engage in full-fledged wars with the neighbouring empires. All these pressing problems left him very little time to even think of any improvement in the educational system. It would not have been possible for him, under those circumstances, to undertake major educational reforms. Keeping in mind the fact that his tenure as caliph lasted only a little over two years,⁴ whatever little he could achieve in the field of education appears to be considerable.

In spite of the grave problems faced by him and the very short period that he was destined to serve the community and guide its destiny, the period of his caliphate is not insignificant from the point of view of educational and literary activities. In fact, it can boast of being one of the greatest achievements in this field as, it was during this period that the verses of the Quran were 'collected' and Quran was 'compiled' as one 'whole' in its present form. It is a living testimony to the far-sightedness of this great Caliph that he realised the need and importance of the compilation of the Quran and made arrangements for the accomplishment of the task.⁵

As we have already noted earlier during the very lifetime of the Prophet the Quran was preserved in full in the hearts and memories of his Companions and followers and was written on parchment, bones and other writing materials used in those days. It was however, preserved in parts at different places and not as a 'whole' at one place. Different people had committed to heart different parts of the Quran and there were many who had memorized the whole of it and used to recite it whenever needed. But no standard version or form had developed by then. In the *Riddah* wars during the caliphate of Hazrat Abu Bakr a number of prominent *qurra* and *huffaz* (reciter and memorizer of the Quran) were killed, the casualty in the battle of *Yamama* fought against the combined forces of Mosailema and Banu Hanifa, being the heaviest. It would appear from the sources that more than one thousand and two hundred Muslims fell in the battle; this included thirtynine best reciters of the Quran. The situation was thought to be alarming,

calling for concrete and urgent steps for the compilation and preservation of the Quran for the generations to come. It was the ever alert mind of Hazrat Umar which first grasped the gravity of the situation. Initially Caliph Abu Bakr was reluctant in taking up the work as he was always reluctant to under-take anything not done during the life-time of the Prophet. But Hazrat Umar succeeded in convincing him of the imperative need of the compilation of the Quran.⁶ Consequently, Zaid bin Thabit was asked by the Caliph to shoulder this great responsibility. Like the Caliph, he too, was very reluctant to undertake this project but was ultimately prevailed upon by the Caliph and by Hazrat Umar. In this way the process was set in and it resulted in the compilation of Quran in one single volume under the direction of Caliph Abu Bakr and the supervision of Zaid bin Thabit. This was indeed a landmark in the history of Muslim learning and may be taken as the first great achievement of the educational movement set in motion with the rise of Islam.⁷

After the Quran, the next position in the Muslim system of learning is occupied by the Traditions of the Prophet. As has already been pointed out elsewhere, the practice of writing-down the sayings of the Prophet was there even in his own days, though on a very limited scale. Abdullah bin Amr bin al-As used to write down all that he heard from the Prophet. But it seems that the practice was not very common and probably it was confined to certain individuals.⁸ By and large the transmission of the Traditions of the Prophet was done by word-of-mouth and, not through writing. This practice seems to have been continued even during the caliphate of Hazrat Abu Bakr. The impact of the compilation of the Quran does not appear to have been immediate. It is likely that the people who were in the beginning reluctant to compile the Quran, took a little time to realise the desirability and urgency of the compilation of the Traditions of the Prophet. But once the process of compilation of the Quran was set in motion, it was only a matter of time for it to get extended to the compilation of Traditions of the Prophet.⁹ It is reported that Hazrat Abu Bakr had collected 500 Traditions but later on burned them when he came to have certain misgivings about the persons from whom he had heard them. Az-Zahabi has, however, questioned the validity of this report on the ground that Hazrat Abu Bakr himself was so very close to the Prophet that he had no need of any intermediaries. His own

authority would have been sufficient for verifying the Traditions. However, if this report is true, it establishes the fact that Hazrat Abu Bakr too used to write down the Traditions of the Prophet, for, they could not have been burned if they were not kept in the written form.¹⁰

The ten years of the Caliphate of Hazrat Umar make a very special and remarkable phase in the history of Islam. During this period not only the frontiers of the Islamic State were vastly extended to include the entire regions of Persia, Iraq, Palestine, Syria and Egypt, but also in keeping with the requirements of the new situation, many new systems and institutions were developed. Administration, organization of the army, administrative arrangements in the conquered territories, taxation, education, in short, nothing escaped the attention and the all-improving efforts of the Caliph, the great expander, consolidator and administrator of the Islamic State. But here we are not so much concerned with the other aspects of his brilliant reign as with his contributions to and achievements in the field of education.

It has already been noted that it was he who had first realised the need of the compilation of the Quran and it was through his persuasions and efforts that this worthy and great project was undertaken and accomplished during the caliphate of Hazrat Abu Bakr.¹¹ After the assumption of the office of the Caliph, he took special interest in universalizing the teachings of Islam and learning of its primary sources. Recitation of the Quran, with utmost care, was greatly encouraged and various steps were taken to guard against any inaccuracies of text or pronunciation. These measures included the circulation of authenticated copies of the Quran on as large a scale as possible, and inducing people to memorize the entire Holy Book.¹² To further ensure the correct recitation and learning of the Quran, Caliph Umar decreed that Arabic language and literature should also be taught along with the Quran. These measures were largely responsible for the preservation of the purity of Quran.¹³

Along with the Quran, Caliph Umar also felt concerned for the preservation of the Traditions of the Prophet, and took suitable steps in that direction. Urwah reports that Umar wanted the Prophet's Traditions to be written and compiled under the state supervision.¹⁴ He consulted the Companions of the Prophet also about

this matter and complete unanimity of opinion about the need and urgency of preserving the Traditions seems to have been emerged. But on second thoughts the project was abandoned, though the reasons behind this decision have not been well spelled out. This gave people a free hand to interpret the Traditions as they liked. Some scholars believe that the project about the preservation of the Traditions in written form was dropped because it would have been tantamount to giving priority to the Hadith literature while as yet copies of the Quran were not available in most of the regions.¹⁵ But this interpretation is hardly convincing. There was no question of giving priority to Hadith in the matter as Quran had already been compiled, though, of course, its copies were not very common. But, on the other hand, no attempt was made till that time to preserve in written form the vast treasure of Hadith. The apprehension that in the absence of proper recording, portions of the Tradition might get lost was, therefore, quite genuine.

There are also reports that Caliph Umar not only abandoned the project of compilation of Hadith but also issued an order directing all those who happened to possess any written collection of Hadith to burn their collection.¹⁶ This gives an impression that he did not like anything to be written except the Quran. No doubt he was primarily interested in the Quran but, at the same time, it is known for certain that he was not generally against another written materials.¹⁷ There are instances where he not only permitted writing down of even pre-Islamic poetry but also encouraged it.¹⁸ It is also a well-known fact that it was during his caliphate that for the first time in the history of Islam registers were used to keep a roll of names of the members of the community. It was also during his rule that written communications were resorted to at a very large scale with the military commanders and the government officers posted at far-flung regions.¹⁹ All this makes it clear that he had no bias against writing as such.

Then, how the statements quoted above and showing his disinclination to committing Hadith to writing are to be explained? This becomes all the more difficult in the light of the fact that he himself is reported to have collected several documents from the Prophet regarding the taxation. This collection is said to have come down to Abdullah bin Umar who got it read out to him by his servant Nafi.²⁰ Moreover, if there was anything intrinsically wrong with

the committing of Hadith literature to writing, the Companions of the Prophet would not have unanimously agreed with the idea of writing down of the hadith, in the first place.²¹ Obviously, the explanation is to be sought elsewhere.

If the total situation is kept in mind, it would appear that the above-referred-to orders of the Caliph, if issued at all, must have been motivated mainly by his genuine apprehension that people, in their over-enthusiasm for the Hadith, especially the more interesting part of it relating to *maghazi*, may mix up their priorities and give more attention to Hadith than to Quran.²² This highlighting and over-stress on Hadith at the expense of the Quran he would have never allowed to happen. Hence his reluctance, even opposition, to the committing of Hadith to writing, though he was one with the other Companions of the Prophet as far as the realization of the need of preserving Hadith is concerned. Seen in this context, the judgment that Umar was opposed to the compilation and writing down of Hadith as such becomes unjustified and untenable.²³

After the Quran and Hadith, *Fiqh* is the third important subject in the curriculum of Islamic education. The second Caliph made special efforts for its expansion and development. In his usual Friday sermons he used to explain the basic principles of individual and social life and though the official circulars he repeatedly drew the attention of his subordinates towards the fulfilment of the obligatory duties of a Muslim.²⁴ In the appointment of district authorities and even military officers one of the qualification invariably taken into consideration was the knowledge about religion especially *Fiqh* so that they might be able to educate their people about the fundamentals of the religion.²⁵ Abu Ubaida, Salman Farsi, Abu Musa Ashari and Muaz bin Jabal were not only highly distinguished civil and military officers but were also known for their profound depth of knowledge in *Fiqh* and other Islamic sciences.²⁶

Besides appointing learned people to various civil and military position with a view that they would be better able to educate the people under their respective charges, the Caliph took further steps to ensure that the people living in different parts of the vast Muslim dominion, especially the new converts, received necessary instructions in their religion of choice. For this purpose teachers were sent to almost every place and centre of importance. Exact

number of the teachers thus dispatched to various places is not known but it must have been quite large, considering the vastness of the Islamic State. Some names are, however, quite familiar in this field, viz., Imran bin Haseen, Abdullah bin Maqal, Ubadah bin Samit, Abu Darda and Muaz bin Jabal.²⁷ Educational activities of these teachers generally centred around mosques which served as educational centres as well. People used to gather round them in the form of *Halqa* (ring) and received instructions regarding the problems of daily life.²⁸ The main function of these teachers was to instruct the people about religion and their duties towards society and God. This logically involved the teaching of the Quran. True that in the early stages even the Quran was generally taught verbally, but, as we have noted earlier, written copies of the Quran were not totally absent during the Caliphate of Umar. This means that at least some people were taught the Quran from the written copies. If we keep in mind the fact that almost all these teachers were themselves proficient in the art of reading and writing and also laid great emphasis on the use of written document in different situations in keeping with the teachings of Islam, then, it can be surmised that these centres, though originally established as religious centres, were, essentially functioning as educational centres, spreading literacy among the Muslims and spear heading a powerful educational movement. This movement did a great deal in quickly transforming the social situation in the vast Islamic State.

It is a well-known and accepted fact that the spread of literacy and education among the Muslims took place through the medium of religion — through their ever-increasing desire to know more and more about Quran and *Sunnah*. Most of the Islamic sciences which were developed later on, were developed with a view to help them understand the Quran and *Sunnah* in a better way.

Large portions of the Quran were memorized by many Companions and as has been noted elsewhere, Umar had made it almost incumbent on every Muslim to learn by heart, at least, the *Baqra*, the *Nisa*, the *Maidah*, the *Hajj* and the *Noor* chapters of the Quran because of their immense practical importance.²⁹ Moreover, there were some Companions who had memorized the entire Quran and preserved it in their hearts. These included Muaz bin Jabal, Ubadah bin Samit, Ubai bin Ka'ab, Abu Ayub and Abu Darda. Ubai bin Ka'ab had the distinction of being known as *Syed al-Qurra* — the

best reciter of Quran — and the Prophet himself had praised him for his proficiency in the Quran recitation. Umar felt that in addition to the teachers who were being sent to various regions on teaching assignments, the people of those regions should also have the benefit of learning from these distinguished men who had the privilege of having learnt the Quran from the Prophet himself, and the honour of having been praised by him for their proficiency in recitation of the Quran. It was with this end in view that he persuaded some of these Companions to go to Syria on what may be called an educational tour. Ubai bin Ka'ab and Abu Ayub were unable to undertake such an arduous journey because of their old age and ill-health, but the remaining three readily agreed to undertake this project and proceeded on this educational mission.³⁰ They started together and their first halt was at *Hims* and for sometime all of them stayed there educating the people. After some progress had been made in this direction and some people had been trained to act as instructors and supervisors of educational activities in that region, in accordance with the advice of the Caliph, Ubadah bin Samit stayed back at *Himis* to supervise the educational activities there while Abu Darda and Muaz bin Jabal proceeded on the second leg of their educational journey. The next two headquarters were Palestine and Damascus.³¹ The presence of these eminent Companions in these regions, with the specific objective of imparting teaching and learning of Quran, had a very healthy effect on the people permanently settled or temporarily assembled there. It proved catalytic in creating a general interest and fervour for learning the Quran, and thereby, helped in spreading literacy and religious knowledge far and wide. A wave of religious and social awakening went through the regions visited by these distinguished teachers.

Zahabi has given, in his *Tabaqatul Qurra*, an account of the teaching method of Abu Darda.³² According to him, Abu Darda used to sit back in the mosque after Fajr prayers to give lessons the large crowd of eagerly waiting students. The students were divided into groups of ten each. Each such group was placed under the charge and supervision of a tutor from among the very senior students, while he himself moved about between the groups, rendering individual help wherever necessary. As soon as a student completed memorization of the whole of the Quran, he was taken

into his personal discipleship, apparently for higher studies in the Quran and Islamic teachings. It would appear that the persons he appointed as tutors of the groups of students were those who had already completed their studies under his personal supervision. The popularity of the early school of Quranic studies at Damascus may be gauged from the fact that one day when on the order of the distinguished teacher, students were counted, no less than 1600 were found to be present.³³

Needless to say that in this early period the mosques played a pivotal role in the spread of education among the Muslims and their role in this respect can hardly be over emphasized. We find that under Umar, mosques were built on a very large scale not only in the newly founded big cities like Kufah, Basrah and Fustat, but also in small places inhabited by tribesmen. Initially, the mosques were built to provide a place for congregational prayers but gradually they developed into centres of education as well.³⁴ Mosques, thus, played a vital role in radiating knowledge — religious, as well as social — in the early period of Islam.

A study in detail of Umar's educational policy shows that even in that early period compulsory education was in a rudimentary form. Attainment of a certain level of knowledge was expected of every Muslim and steps were taken in that direction in real earnest. For example, as already stated, Caliph Umar made it compulsory for every Muslim to learn at least the *al-Baqra*, *al-Nisaa*, *al-Ma'ida*, *al-Hajj* and *al-Nur*, (Chapters of the Quran) as these are mostly concerned with the practical life and day-to-day affairs.³⁵ Among the steps taken for ensuring this minimum and compulsory learning is the appointment of what may be called in the modern terminology as 'Education Commission' headed by a person, named Abu Sufyan, to conduct a survey of the educational conditions in the Muslim territories. The Bedouins were examined in their learning about Islam and were also punished if they fell short of a minimum level of attainment expected of every Muslim.³⁶ This shows that Caliph Umar had a well-defined educational policy, which he enforced firmly and vigorously. As in other fields, he would not allow any laxity or indifference in this matter, as is evident from the following incident. He is reported to have received a letter from Husain ibn al-Harr in which he found a mistake. He was so much annoyed with this carelessness that he directed Husain

to give his amanuensis a lash so that he may be more careful in future.³⁷ Umar was perfectionist and the field of education could not have remained untouched by his thorough-going approach to all matters.

It has already been discussed that the acquisition of knowledge, as well as its diffusion, is incumbent on a Muslim. But merely voluntary teaching and learning could not have ensured the spread of universal literacy which Umar so much desired and also worked for. So, apart from those engaged in imparting education on their own, there were also required the services of full-time teachers who may take up the job on a permanent basis, without being bothered by the worries of earning their livelihood through other means. Umar is credited to have realized this need and devised ways and means to meet it. He is the first ruler in the history of Islam to have appointed salaried teachers. Sources mention that each teacher was paid, as salary, fifteen dirhams,³⁸ which was a substantial sum, considering the conditions obtaining at that time. Apart from making arrangements for the education of the grown-ups, who had embraced Islam, he also made special arrangements for the education of children. Schools were established for them throughout the Islamic State and teachers were appointed on a salary of fifteen dirhams each — at Madina and other places. In addition to this, homes and mosques also served as places where children could receive education and training. Apart from reading and writing, parents were advised to teach their children the best pieces of poetic compositions and proverbs. Games and sport were also organised for physical training. Running, swimming, throwing of dart, horse-riding, etc., were learnt through rigorous practice.³⁹

Mosques served as centres of adult education. Such centres were called *Halqas*. During the time of Caliph Umar four thousand and nine hundred such, *Halqas* were reported to be in existence, engaged in the task of spreading knowledge.⁴⁰ Out of these nine hundred are said to have been located in mosques.⁴¹

For the purpose of monitoring the progress on the educational front, as well as to encourage those engaged in this work, the Caliph used to call for a list of those who were accomplished in Quranic learning for a periodic check-up. Such lists were called from both the civil and military authorities of the provinces. Once Abu Musa sent, from the area under his control, a list of ten thousand persons

who had memorised Quran and was rewarded by the Caliph for his educational efforts.⁴² The Caliph was very much conscious about the importance of knowledge in public life. Once he issued a circular ordering that anyone who did not possess sufficient knowledge of Islamic laws concerning commerce would not be allowed to open a shop in the market.⁴³

It is evident from these details that Umar was deeply interested in the spread of learning among the Muslims and relentlessly followed a well-defined policy in this regard. It was mainly through his efforts that a sound foundation of an educational system was laid down, on which the succeeding generations went on building their own super-structures. Like other aspects of administration, education too bore the imprint of his imaginative and dynamic personality and administrative vision.

As in other fields, in education also, Caliph Uthman continued with the policies of his predecessors, particularly of Umar.⁴⁴ His one great achievement in the field of education is the universalization of the uniform and standard text of the Quran. It has been noticed earlier that during the Caliphate of Abu Bakr a standard copy of the Quran had been prepared by a Board appointed by the Caliph. But, during those hectic days many copies of the standard Quranic Text could not be prepared for large-scale supply and distribution. Arabic, being a complex language, with variations of pronunciation, there arose a number of orthographic difficulties. As a result of this, differences in accent in the recitation of the Quran were getting currency in various regions. This situation was fraught with danger as it was likely to create, with the passage of time, many problems not only of reading and pronunciation but also of interpretation.⁴⁵ Quran being the basis of Islam and most valued possession of Muslims on earth, such a situation would have been extremely disastrous.

Huzaifa, a prominent Companion of the Prophet was first to feel the danger inherent in this situation, and the paramount necessity of doing something to check it. While fighting on the front of Armenia and Azerbaijan, he came face-to-face with this problem. He found, to his horror, that there was quite a lot of difference in recitation of the Quran as pronounced by the Syrians and the Iraqis. He was quick to see the danger inherent in such a situation and brought the matter to the notice of Uthman, urging upon him to

do something urgently about it so that the Quranic Text may not become a subject of controversy in future like the scriptures of the Jews and of the Christians.⁴⁶

The Caliph realized the gravity of the situation and took prompt and immediate steps in this regard. A committee was appointed under the chairmanship of Zaid bin Thabit; other members of the committee were Abdur Rahman bin Haris, Abdullah bin Zubair and Sayeed bin al-'As. It may be recalled here that Zaid was also the chairman of the commission appointed by the first Caliph to prepare a standard Text of the Quran. The standard text of the Quran was requisitioned from Hazrat Hafsa in whose custody it was ever since its compilation. The commission was charged with the responsibility of preparing copies in accordance with this Text and, in case of any difference of opinion in the rendering of a particular word, the accent and usage of Quraish was to be given precedence and preference as it was their language and usage in which the Quran was revealed. After the completion of the job by the commission, the original standard Text of the Quran was retained at Madina and its copies were sent to Makka, Basrah, Kufah, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain, probably with the instruction that it might further be copied faithfully and disseminated among the people. Later on, these copies came to be known as *mashif al-amsar* and, it was from these copies that further copies came to be prepared from widespread distribution. And yet, this was not thought to be enough. It was realized that so long as non-standard copies of the Quran continued to be there in private possession of less literate people, the risk of discrepancies in the reading of the Quran still remained. The only way to meet this eventuality was to dig out and destroy all such private collections of Quranic Text as did not tally word for word, with the standard Text. It was with this view that all efforts were made to locate and destroy such private copies.⁴⁷ It was indeed a great service to the cause of the preservation of the Quran and safeguarding it from becoming a subject of controversy and a source of dissensions among the Muslims. It redounds to the credit of the third Caliph that he succeeded in accomplishing this enormous and onerous task. It was very unfortunate and sad that in the peculiar political atmosphere obtaining in certain quarters of the Islamic state, this great service was sought to be misconstrued as a disservice and something meant to damage the cause of Islam. Nothing can be far from truth than this.⁴⁸

The fourth Caliph of Islam, Hazrat Ali, was known for his outstanding learning and soundness of judgement. According to a famous Tradition, the Prophet is the 'city of knowledge' and Ali, 'its door'. This tradition places him on a very high pedestal of knowledge. He also served as one of the scribes of the Prophet. It is stated that the Prophet once dictated to him and he wrote on a large piece of parchment, and on both sides of it. He was also said to have in his possession a *Kitab* in which traditions, directives and guidelines of the Prophet regarding *Zakat* and taxation were collected. It is reported that he used to encourage the students to write down Hadith.⁴⁹

Ali's ardent love for knowledge is evident from his statements, such as:

"To him who will teach me one new fact I shall be indebted all my life".⁵⁰ Once he advised his student Kumayyil as follows:

"O Kumayyil! learning is preferable to wealth; you guard wealth while learning guards you; wealth will run short with spending, while knowledge will be increased by dispersion".⁵¹ The following saying is also attributed to Ali bin Abi Talib:

"He dies not who gives his life to learning".⁵²

The fourth Caliph also appears to have continued the educational policy of Caliph Umar and no major change seem to have been introduced. However, his period of Caliphate was not entirely sterile as far as developments in the field of education are concerned. Even in the midst of hectic political activities and frequent wars, he was able to find time to make significant contributions to the advancement of learning, especially to the promotion of Arabic language and literature. When he found that the words of the Quran were being inaccurately read and pronounced by the non-Arab new entrants to the fold of Islam, who were not very familiar with the nuances of the language of the Quran, he decided to provide some guidelines to such people in the matter. It is said that he got the first principal of pronunciation and grammatical rules written down. In this way he became the first to have invented the first principles of grammar. And the pioneer grammarian of Arabic language, Abu Aswad Duali, a student of Ali, made his formulations of grammar accordingly.⁵³

Besides grammar, another contribution of Hazrat Ali to the cause of learning was that he was the first to have introduced the

system of granting stipend to the students. This tradition was followed by the Muslim rulers and continues to this day.⁵⁴

The task of educating a nation, steeped in illiteracy and ignorance, was, however, a gigantic one. Governmental efforts alone would not have accomplished the job. The enormity of the task assumed formidable proportions as the number of those needing education increasingly swelled by the entry of non-Arabs in the Islamic fold. This stupendous task required more than the efforts of the government, though, as noted earlier, the caliphs did not spare any effort to achieve this objective. The community realised the enormity of the problem and rose to the occasion. This resulted in commencement of an unprecedented mass-movement of literacy in which every literate member of the community was a participant. This was a natural corollary of the Islamic revolution which attached so much value to the acquisition of knowledge and its dissemination.

The role of the individual companions, therefore, proved very crucial in the overall spread of education during the early period of Islamic history. With the annexation of the territories of the Persian and Roman empires to the Islamic State, many of the Companions settled in different regions outside the Arabian peninsula. According to a moderate estimate the companion present in Syria counted no less than ten thousand while in Kufah, Hims and Egypt their number was one thousand, five hundred, three hundred and fifty, respectively.⁵⁵ These companions became the nucleus of all educational activities in those regions and centres of mass-literacy movement. In this way while all of them made their own contributions to make this movement a success, some of them dedicated their whole lives to this great endeavour. Gradually they developed into a specialised group devoted specially to Quranic studies. They came to be known as *al-Qurra*.⁵⁶ (reciters and readers of the Quran.)

These were the people who had the good fortune of receiving knowledge and training at the feet of the Prophet and acquired proficiency in Quranic as well as other forms of Islamic learning. In the wake of the Islamic conquests they, along with others, spread in every nook and corner of the conquered territories and settled there. They took it upon themselves to educate the people, Arabs as well as non-Arab Muslims, in various branches of Islamic learning,

particularly, Quranic learning. Besides imparting instructions to the common people, they also made efforts to train certain people to continue this educational movement. Many of them established their separate schools for this purpose which became focal-points of educational activities in their respective regions.⁵⁷ This, incidentally, made them a force to be reckoned with in their respective areas and gave them a leverage in social and political affairs. Among their students were Arabs as well as non-Arabs who had entered the fold of Islam and had a keen desire of knowing more and more about the religion they had embraced. The syllabus naturally consisted of the Quran, Hādith and different aspects of the Islamic history, particularly the life of the Prophet. These *Qurra* and their *halqas* (centres) played a very crucial role in universalizing education in the early periods of Islamic history.⁵⁸

Besides these, there was another group of the companions of the Prophet who had attained a very high distinction in various branches of Islamic learning and had specialized in it. They were actually the founders of different schools of thought within the Islamic fold of thought. They devoted their entire lives to in-depth studies of certain topics and in teaching the same to the students who thronged around them. Like other companions they also dispersed to different areas of the Islamic State and carried on their mission of disseminating Islamic learning. No discussion of the educational activities in the early Islamic period would be complete without making a mention of contributions of, at least, the more prominent ones among them.

ABDULLAH B. ABBAS

A cousin of the Prophet and widely acknowledged as the father of the Quranic exegesis, from his early days he evinced deep interest in gathering information concerning the Prophet by questioning the Prophet's companions. He used to sit at the door of the companions even in very hot and gusty weather to learn *Hādith* from the companions. His deep interest in the matter as well as his scholarly and critical approach to gathering reliable information is evidenced by the fact that he used to inquire from as many as thirty companions regarding one single incident. As a result, he soon became a scholar-par-excellence and to him turned many of those who wanted to learn about the interpretation of the Quran, judicial

decisions, Prophet's expeditions (*al-Maghazi*), pre-Islamic history and ancient poetry. But his forte and subject of special interest was exegesis in which he was exceptionally proficient, so much so that many of the Prophet's traditions concerning the interpretation of the Quran are traced to him. His knowledge was based not on memory alone but also on a large collection of written notes in his possession. He gave public lectures and arranged classes on the subjects mentioned above.⁵⁹ He fixed certain days for different subjects, e.g., one day for law, the next day for his commentary on the Quran, the third day for *al-Maghazi* and so on. During the days of the pilgrimage, his teaching-circles used to attract a very large number of people. His circles were also attended by many non-Arabs for whose benefit he sometimes used to obtain the services of interpreters to translate their questions into Arabic and his answers to them.⁶⁰

ABDULLAH B. AL-A'S

He embraced Islam before his father had migrated to Madina. He knew Hebrew and used to read the books in that language, which he had found at Yarmuk. It is said that he used to write down everything he heard from the Prophet. Some of the companions objected to it but the Prophet granted him permission to continue the practice. He wrote a book named *al-Sahifah al-Sadiqah* and also collected some *Hadith* in written form on the authority of Abu Bakr. His written works were also on the subjects of early history, *Maghazi* and the biography of the Prophet. This fondness for writing became all the more remarkable in view of the greater reliance of the Arabs of those days on memory and their general aversion to writing. Contrary to the prevalent practice, his method of teaching was based not on verbal expression alone but also included dictation of the wording of *Hadith* to his students.⁶¹

ABDULLAH B. MASU'D

He received instruction in the Quran by the Prophet himself and memorized it under his personal supervision.⁶² He had also the honour of having recited it before the Prophet and getting his approval. During the period of the third Caliph, Uthman, he was a treasury-officer at Basrah, where he also acted as a teacher of the Quran. His circle of studies used to attract very large number of

students.⁶³ He is also said to have collected a copy of the Quran for his personal use as well as for purpose of teaching and instruction. He was very proud of it and often used to say that his was the most authentic copy of the Quran because he had recited it to the Prophet and received his approval.⁶⁴ Apparently, it was his memorization of the Quran that had received the approval of the Prophet; the collection must have come quite later because we do not hear anything about his copy of the Quran in connection with the official compilation of the Quran which was carried on during the caliphate of Abu Bakr. Had a collected and compiled copy of the Quran been in existence at that time, it would surely have been used in compiling the standard copy of the Quran. In all probability, such a copy of the Quran did not exist at that time.

When numerous copies of the Quran were prepared from the standard Text during the caliphate of Uthman, under the over all supervision of Zaid bin Thabit and as a precautionary measure all other copies were sought to be destroyed, Ibn Masud became very critical of the Caliph. He used to criticise Uthman's regime before his students in his teaching-circles which were numerous and very wide. This might have lent some strength and support to the rebellion started later on against Uthman. This would also suggest that education in that period had some political and social overtones as well and was not just religious and spiritual in nature and character. It reflected the tensions of the times.⁶⁵

ABDULLAH B. UMAR B. AL-KHATTAB

A large number of *Ahadith* are transmitted on his authority. He had a very high standing among the companions which he owed to his qualities of mind and heart and to his habit of very meticulously following the Prophet in his daily life, and not to the fact that he was the son of great Caliph, Umar. He kept himself away from day-to-day politics and the one and only one occasion when he came somewhere near practical politics was when, after the death of Umar, he acted as convener of the council appointed by the dying-Caliph, to choose the new Caliph. But, even then, he did not act on his own, but was rather asked by Umar himself to help the council in coming to a decision. And, he himself was not to be considered for the post. He even declined to accept the office of a *Qazi* (Judge) fearing that he might not be able to correctly interpret

the law.⁶⁶ He was the most prominent teacher of *Hadith* at Madina but he was very strict in reporting these and used to take great precautions in this regard. It was always his endeavour to maintain the exact sequence of the words, as spoken and delivered by the Prophet.⁶⁷ The chain of transmissions tracing authority to him, through Salim and Nafai and incorporated in the *Muwatta* of Iman Malik, are known as the golden chain.

AMR B. HAZAM

He was appointed by the Prophet as a governor of Najran. Apart from his official duties, he also used to teach the people. He had a letter (*Kitab*) from the Prophet in which the timings of the prayer, methods and rules of the prayer, ablution, war-booty, taxation, *zakat* and *diyat*, etc., were explicitly stated.⁶⁸

ANAS B. MALIK

He has the singular honour of having served the Prophet during his life at Madina and was greatly beholden to him. As such, he had the opportunity to learn a lot from the Prophet and observe him from very close quarters. Due to this fact his knowledge about the Prophet was vast and intimate. And, therefore, when he began to teach the people, the response was enormous. Large number of students used to attend his classes and the list of those who transmitted *Hadith* through him, or, prepared their own collections, is a long one. Unlike other teachers of *Hadith* he did not confine his teaching to verbal transmission but used to bring books before the students. These books consisted of the Traditions he had heard from the Prophet and had committed them to writing. He is reported to have said that he had read them before the Prophet for his approval.⁶⁹

ABU HURAIRAH

He is one of the most prominent transmitters and teachers of *Hadith*. The period of his association with the Prophet was only of three years, comparatively very short, but his transmission of the Traditions is more numerous as compared to that of any other companion. This had created misgivings in the minds of many people. The fact, however, is that he belonged to the circle of *Suffah* and like others of the group, did not engage himself in anything to

earn his livelihood and was totally dependent on the Prophet. Keeping free from these burdens, he used to spend his entire time in the company of the Prophet, learning and observing. It was due to this fact that he became able to transmit such a large number of the Prophet's Traditions. The actual number of the Hadith transmitted by him is quite large.⁷⁰

MUAWIYAH B. ABU SUFYAN

A brother-in-law of the Prophet and a very prominent member of the family of Banu Umayya, he also acted as a scribe (*Katib al-wahy*) to the Prophet. He was known for his fine literary taste and was deeply interested in the Traditions of the Prophet. He is reported to have encouraged the writing of *Hadith*. He asked Ayesha and Mughirah to write down *Hadith*⁷¹ and the latter complied with his request.⁷² In spite of his busy schedule as the governor of Syria, and later on, as the Caliph, he could manage to find time to teach people *Hadith* and asked others also to do the same.⁷³ He was also deeply interested in history and used to spare some time to acquaint himself with the history of the Arabs. He was instrumental in the writing of the first book of history in Arabic language dealing with the folk-tales and battles of the tribes. Abid bin Sharyah compiled the book *Kitabul Muluk wa Akhbarul Madinah* at his behest.⁷⁴

It is evident, therefore, that even in the midst of numerous problems, in those early days of Islam, the Muslim community managed to evolve a sound educational policy consistent with the status accorded to it by Islam and the requirements of the community. The task of educating the community was taken as a great endeavour in which all the components of the society participated and contributed to. The individual teachers organized their own 'educational circles' in their home and more specially in the mosques. These individual teachers took all this trouble as a labour of love, without any expectation of a 'material gain' for their pains. They formed the vanguard of the great movement of literacy and universalization of education that the Islamic revolution had set in motion. These educational circles were not confined to any particular region; they were spread all over the Islamic dominions. The contribution of these private teachers in the spread of education among the Muslims cannot be over-emphasized.

Besides these individual teachers, the state too, played an important role in the spread of education, especially during the caliphate of Umar. A net-work of schools appears to have been established throughout the Islamic State, especially, for the cause of education of children. Education of the adults too was not neglected. For these schools salaried teachers were appointed on full-time basis and they were relieved of the cares of their daily needs. At least about Madina it is definitely known that a salary of 15 *dirhams* was fixed for the teachers.⁷⁵ As the need of educating the community was not confined only to Madina, this system must have been extended to other areas as well. There is also evidence that, at least, a minimum standard was prescribed which was to be achieved and maintained by all and sundry. For ensuring it, a commission was appointed during Umar's Caliphate to tour the Arab tribes and conduct examinations. The defaulters and recalcitrant were suitably punished. Obviously, all this was calculated to generate spread of education among the Muslims at a very fast pace.

In the syllabus, the pride of place was assigned to the Quran, followed by *Sunnah* and *Fiqh*. Due attention was also paid to the physical health of the students. For this running, riding and swimming were encouraged. The students were instructed in the art of writing also. Though most of the education in the early days was carried verbally, the use of books and dictation of the lessons was not entirely unknown and some of the teachers are known to have been in the habit of using written material during their lectures and permitted their students to take notes. Some of the teachers attracted very large number of students to their circles. The teachers were highly respected and much regard and respect was paid to them. The teachers on their part treated the student with love and affection and went out of their way to help and encourage them. They considered it their bounden duty to communicate their knowledge and learning to others.⁷⁶

Moreover, during this period the women did not lag behind the men in the twin task of acquisition and diffusion of knowledge. The house of Ayesha was the greatest centre of education for women. It was about the same time that Ibn Umar, Abu Huraira, Ibn Abbas, Zaid Bin Thabit, etc., had established their independent educational centres in Madina. The house of the Prophet's wife (Ayesha), however, played very distinctive role in the field of

education.⁷⁷ She used to sit in her *Hujrah* (room) behind a curtain. Boys; women as well as her male relatives used to join her circle and other people sat in that part of the Prophet's Mosque which was just in front of her *Hujrah*.⁷⁸ Her instruction was based on question-answer method; people asked questions and she gave the answers.⁷⁹ Sometimes she herself raised some problems which were thoroughly discussed by the teacher and her students.⁸⁰ She paid particular attention to the students' language, their mode of speaking and correct use of words.⁸¹ The number of her students was very large. Sulaiman Nadvi, basing himself on Ibn Hajar, observes that Abu Musa Ashari, Abu Huraira, Ibn Umar, Ibn Abbas, Amr Bin al-As, Zaid Bin Khalid Jahni, Rabia Bin Amr al-Jarshi, Saeb Bin Yazid and Haris Bin Abdullah and other companions were included among her students.⁸² He also says that as far as the next generation is concerned almost every scholar of *Hadith* happened to be her student.⁸³ He further claims that he has been able to prepare a list of two hundred such students. It is a matter of great interest that this list includes the names of forty-eight women who were under direct guidance of Ayesha. Her house was the most reputed women-centre.⁸⁴

Hazrat Ayesha was, however, not the only teacher engaged in the task of educating women. Others, included Fatimah, daughter of the Prophet, who was at home in prosody and oration, her daughters Zainab, Kulthum and grand-daughters, Sakeena, Fatimah, Sughra were highly educated. Ayesha Bint Talha was a distinguished scholar of poetry and astrology.⁸⁵ The women acquired the knowledge of *Hadith* from the companions of the Prophet who were engaged in educating the people. The wife of a scholar taught others what she learnt from her husband.⁸⁶ All this goes to suggest that education of women, though not so well-organized as education of men, was well cared for. The mass-movement for literacy and education launched by Islam could not have left women unaffected, especially when a lot depended on their proper nurture and upbringing. Thus much before most of the European nations could even think of the parity of sexes in education, and life, Islam showed the way in the most practical and psychologically and sociologically sound manner. The Islamic society gave and granted women their rights, including the right to education, which they were denied for centuries together. The dawn of Islam, therefore,

marked a new social and educational awakening not only for men but for women also. The social role and status which Islam gave to women was not only commensurate and in consonance with their psychological nature but was also sought to be fully backed by a sound system of education.

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1. Semaan, pp. 192-93.
2. Hitti, *History of the Arabs*, p. 217.
3. Semaan, pp. 192-93.
4. Sayeed Akhter, p. 17.
5. Ahmad Abdul-Rahman al-Banna; *Al-Fathe-Rabbani Letartib Musnad al-Imam Hanbal al-Shebani*, Vol. XXVIII, p. 31-32.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 31-33 also see, Sayeed Akbarabadi, *Siddiqui Akbar*, p. 392.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 32; also see Sayeed Akbarbad, p. 393.
8. Azmi, p. 43.
9. Muniruddine, p. 36.
10. Azmi, p. 34.
11. *Al-Fathe Rabbani*, Vol. XXVIII; pp. 31-32.
12. Shibli, *Al-Farooque*, Vol. II, p. 117.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 120.
14. Azmi, p. 56.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
17. Azmi, p. 58.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 58; also see Shibli, *al-Farooque*, Vol. II, p. 96 and p. 132.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 57.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 58.
23. Shibli, *Al-Farooque*, Vol. II, p. 120.
24. *Ibid.*, p. 122.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
26. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
27. *Ibid.*, p. 124.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 125.
29. *Kunzul Ummal*, Vol. I, p. 224 as quoted in *al-Farooque*, Vol. II, p. 119.
30. Shibli, *AL-Farooque*, Vol. II, p. 118.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
32. Vide *Ibid.*, p. 119.
33. Vide *Ibid.*,
34. Shalaby: p. 48, also see Shibli, *al-Farooque*, Vol. II, p. 126.
35. *Khuzul 'Ummal*, Vol. I, p. 224, vide Shibli, *al-Farooque*, Vol. II, 119; also see Sayeed Akhter, p. 21.
36. Shibli, *al-Farooque* Vol. II, p. 118, also see Sayeed Akhter, p. 21.
37. Shalaby, p. 43.
38. Shibli: *al-Farooque* Vol. II, p. 18, also Sayeed Akhter, p. 17.
39. Shalaby, p. 174.
40. Sayeed Akhter: p. 17.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 18.
42. *Ibid.*,
43. *Ibid.*,
44. *Ibid.*, p. 17.
45. Bukhari, Kitab Faza'el al-Quran, Bab Jama al-Quran, Vol. II, p. 746.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 746.
47. *Ibid.* also see, *Raghib al-Tabbakh, As-Saqafat al-Islamia*, Urdu translation by Iftekhar Ahmad Balkhi, Markazi Maktaba Islami, Delhi, 1983, p. 140-142; Sayeed Ahmad Akbarabadi *Siddique Akbar*, p. 400; Hitti, p. 12; Muir, *The Life of Mohammad*, p. XX.
48. Leone Caetani: Uthman and the Recension of the Koran, *Muslim World*, Oct., 1915, p. 389.
49. Azmi, pp. 47-48.
Bayard Dodge in his article "Subjects and Titles of Books in the first four centuries" says "There is a tradition coming down from Abd-Khayr that when the Prophet died, Ali swore that he would not take off his cloak until he collected the Quranic revelations in full. So he remained inside his house for three days, writing down the revelations from his memory. During the period of Bannu al-Abbas his manuscript was still in existence at the home of Abu-Ya'la Hamzah al-Hasani". Islamic Culture Oct., 1954, p. 526.
50. Leone, H.M.: Physiology and Medicine under the Khalifa, *Islamic Culture* Oct., 1927, p. 562.
51. Shalaby, p. 162.
52. *Ibid.*,
53. Sayeed Akhter, p. 18 also see Bayard Dodge, p. 527.
54. Sayeed Akhter, p. 22.
55. Shibli, Maqalat, as quoted in *Hamara Nezam-e-Taleem*, p. 18-19.
56. Leone Caetani, 386.
57. *Ibid.*,
58. Khursheed Ahmad Farique, *Hazrat Uthman ke Sarkari Khutut*, Nadwatul Musaneffen Delhi, 1965, p. 8.
59. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. I, p. 40.
60. Azmi, p. 40.
61. Azmi, p. 43.
62. *Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. III, p. 873.
63. Khursheed Ahmad Farique, p. 106.
64. *Ibid.* p. 108 also see, Azmi, p. 45.
65. Khursheed Ahmad Farique, p. 107.
66. *The Encyclopedia of Islam*, Vol. I, p. 53.
67. Azmi, p. 45.
68. *Ibid.*, p. 48.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
70. "According to Ibn al-Jauzi there are 5374 *Ahadith* transmitted by him in *Musnad Baqi* and 3848 *ahadith* in *Musnad* of Ibn Hanbal. According to Ahmad Shakir, after subtracting repeated *ahadith* there remain 1579 *ahadith* transmitted by Abu Hurairah: see Azmi, p. 37.
71. Azmi, 53.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
73. *Ibid.* p. 53.
74. The book was available until the time of al-Masudi (vide *Muruj al-Dhahb* Vol. II, p. 60). Ibn Nadim, *al-Fihrist*, p. 132; as quoted by Nasir Ahmad Faruqi *Early Muslim Historiography*, Idara Adabiyyat Delhi, 1979, p. 5.

75. Shibli, *Al-Farooque*, Vol. II, p. 118.
76. Sayeed Akhter, p. 19.
77. Sulaiman Nadvi: *Seerat-i-Ayesha*, Ma'arif, Press, Azamgarh, 1917, p. 299.
78. *Musnad* Vol. 6, p. 72, Ibn Sa'ad Vol. III, p. 29 as quoted in *Seerat-i-Ayesha*, p. 299.
79. *Musnad* Vol. 6, p. 75, vide *Ibid.*, p. 299.
80. *Seerat-i-Ayesha*, p. 299.
81. Vide *Ibid.*, pp. 299-300.
82. *Seerat-i-Ayesha*, p. 302.
83. *Ibid.*, p. 303.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 304.
85. Sayeed Akhter, p. 32.
86. Tritton, A.S., *Materials on Muslim Education in the Middle Ages*, p. 140.

Conclusions

The Present study has led to the following broad conclusions: Learning and education were not unknown to the Arabs in the Pre-Islamic period. There is evidence to show that they had a fairly developed language and literature of their own. The skills of reading and writing were known to them, though not at a mass level. There is also evidence to indicate that they used written documents in their business transactions, through, again, not at a widespread level. Literacy was limited to the economically well off elites and the general public lived in poverty, groaning under illiteracy and ignorance. The worst sufferers in this respect were the women, who were considered as less than human and were treated as worse than slaves. They had no rights of their own and were to stomach all kinds of injustices and humiliations. Consequently, the Pre-Islamic period has come to be known as the 'Dark Ages' or the 'Period of Ignorance'.

It does not mean that education was totally absent during the Pre-Islamic period. There is evidence to show that, at least, a primitive type of educational system was in operation, particularly at Makkah, Daumatuljandal and Anbar, where a few educational institutions were also functioning creditably. The Jewish community at Madina had a tradition of learning and had founded educational institutions known as *Baital Midras* for the benefit of its own members. Besides, Banu Hudhail were also conducting a school attended both by boys and girls. Such educational institutions, though primitive in many ways, go to suggest that the Pre-Islamic Arabs had not only some awareness of their educational needs and problems but were also responding to them in a significant manner.

With the advent of Islam there came a total transformation of the society. Every department of life got influenced and

revolutionised, education being no exception to it. Islam came to lay great emphasis both on the acquisition as well as diffusion of knowledge. It is a matter of great significance that the first revelation to the Prophet begins with the words *Iqra* (Read). Islam made learning a life-long process in the pursuit of truth and happiness here and hereafter. Every believer in Islam was enjoined to be a life-long student and teacher. Learned men came to be considered as superior even to the devout. Knowledge gained superiority over piety. Moreover, in this process of learning, utility, honesty and purity in the cultivation and advancement of knowledge were always maintained. Knowledge was not for the sake of knowledge. This approach towards education was responsible for bringing about a revolutionary change in a society which was barely aware of reading and writing; it set in motion a movement for literacy. Besides the mosque of the Prophet and *Suffah* where instructions were imparted under the direct supervision of the Prophet, there were other institutions such as *Kuttab* and *Dar al-Qurra* which catered to the educational needs of the community, which was attaching great value to learning under the new dispensation. Other mosques of Madina also served not only as places of worship but also as centres of learning. Some individuals also used their homes as centres for educating the people. Even in the early Makkan period the home of *al-Arqam* was used as a centre for education. Scribes, *Qurra* and *Huffaz* played crucial role in the spread of knowledge in the early Islamic period. In the scheme of Islamic education priority of place was given to the learning of Quran and Sunnah followed by other subjects relevant to the worldly and other worldly needs of the community. Education was free and poverty was never a hindrance in its acquisition. Specialization in the different branches of Islamic learning was also encouraged from the very beginning. The educational programme was well-organised and systematic and also included supervision and guidance.

Female education was given due importance and special arrangements were made for instructing women into the essential of Islam as well as the basic skills of social life. They were also provided guidance in vocational skills like wool-carding spinning and weaving.

It was this educational system which was developed and built upon during the period of pious caliphate. A well-defined educational policy consistent with the Islamic teachings as well as the requirement of the community was adopted by the pious Caliphs. The state, particularly during the period of Caliph Umar, played a very important role in the quantitative and qualitative expansion of education. A network of schools was established throughout the Islamic State, imparting instruction to children as well as to grownups in the religious as well as non-religious matters. At least in some place like Madina salaried teachers were appointed and a minimum standard of teaching was prescribed which everybody was expected to attain. For monitoring progress in education Caliph Umar appears to have appointed a commission to tour the Arab tribes and conduct examinations. The fourth Caliph, Ali, is credited to have instituted stipends to promote education.

Besides the State, individual teachers also played a crucial role in the universalisation of education. They organised their own educational circles or centres in their homes and more particularly in the mosques of their locality. These individual teachers were informed of and motivated by a missionary zeal, rendered services free and never accepted any return for their services. They were not confined to any particular region but spread all over the Islamic dominion. As the time passed the curriculum got richer and more diversified. Due attention was also paid to and care taken of the physical well-being of the students. They were trained in different skills relevant to the requirements of the community. Though education was mostly carried on verbally, use of books and dictation of lessons was not uncommon. While men were engaged feverishly in educational activities, women also did not lag behind in the twin task of acquisition and diffusion of knowledge. The house of Ayesha, particularly, was one of the greatest centres of education for both men and women.

Thus, the educational history of the early Islamic period, if seen in the light of pre-Islamic history of education, shows a phenomenal change and growth in all aspects of education. Beginning with a scratch it was, within a very short period, heading towards universal literacy.

Education for enlightenment, for exaltation of personality, for emancipation of women, for acquisition of professional and vocational skills and excellence, for eradication of illiteracy, for abolition of slavery, and for better and more satisfying and fruitful community-living came to be accepted as a principle of life and a policy of the State. And this single and most revolutionary change in the human outlook was the direct outgrowth of the teachings of Islam and its emphasis on education as a liberating and humanising force.

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